

DETECTIVE SHORT STORIES

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CASE OF THE
DOOMED DEBUTANTE

by
ROGER TORREY



THE CANDID
CADAVERS

by

E. K. GOLDTHWAITE

★ ★

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DETECTIVE SHORT STORIES

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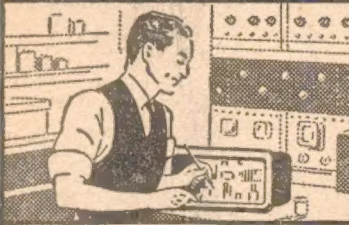
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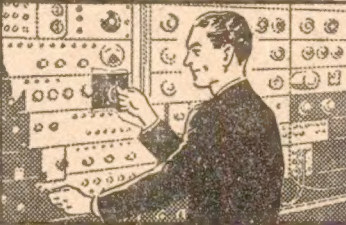
"I had an \$18 a week job in a shoe factory." He'd probably be there today if he hadn't read about the opportunities in Radio and started training at home for them.



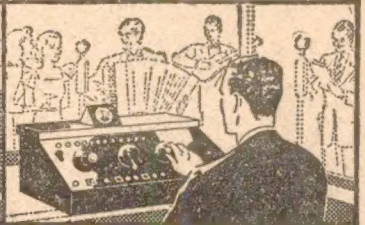
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**Profits Typical of
the Young, Growing Industry**

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**This Business Has
Nothing to Do With
House to House Canvassing**

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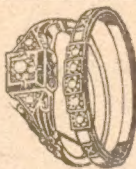
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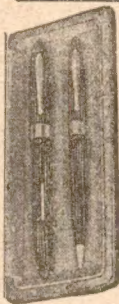


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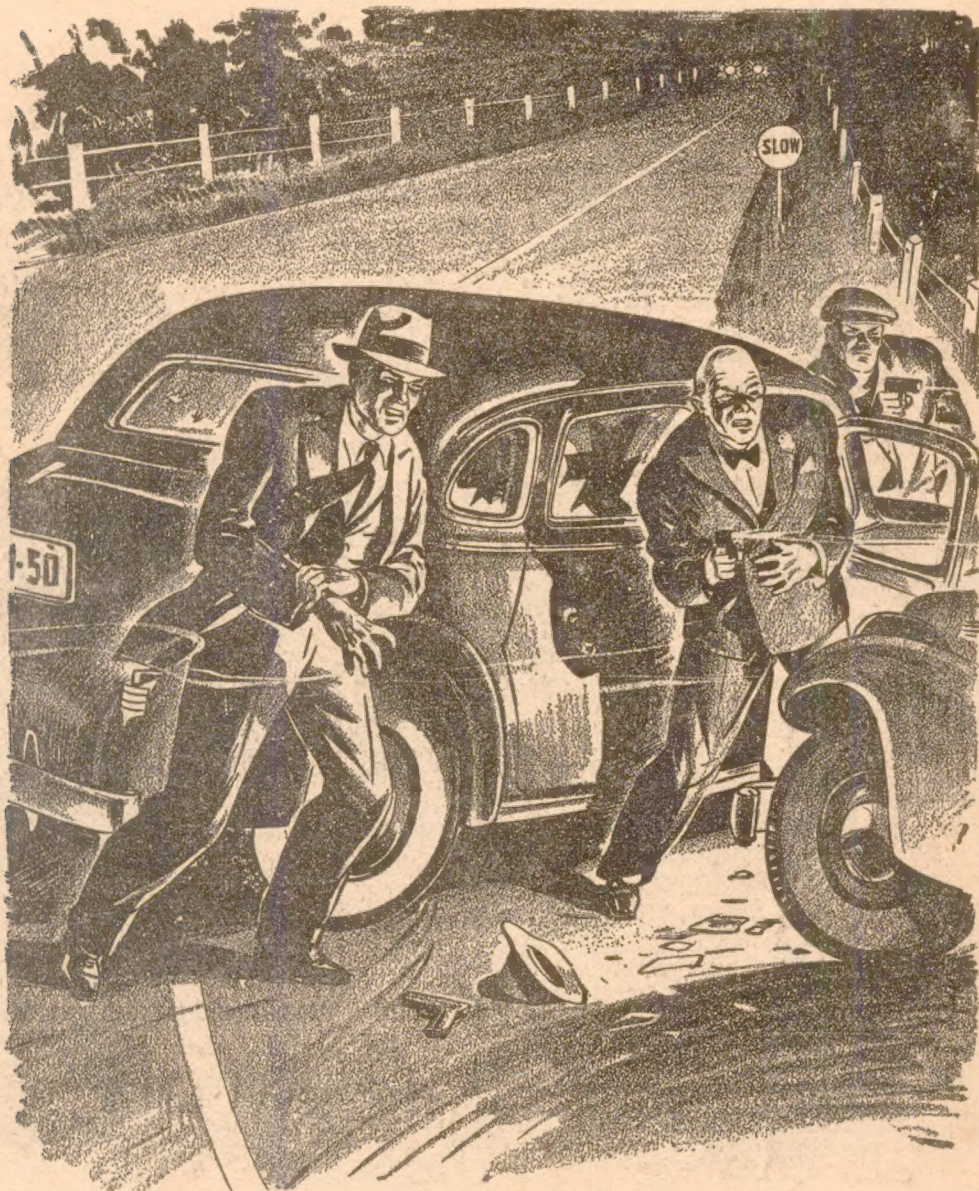
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CASE OF THE DOOMED

You see, everybody had an alibi but the girl, that was the rub. and all the suspects, and blood all over.—A guy just hated to get would finally get



Stanislaus turned, shooting, and he was outlined against the ambulance lights, Casey shot him once

JOHN CASEY waited in the hall for the doctor while Olson started rounding up the servants for questioning. Constance Wilkes started to pass, and Casey stopped her and said:

"Miss Wilkes! I'm John Casey . . . the butler brought me up."

"Oh yes," she said. "From the police."

"Right. I understand you found the

HERE IS MURDER, HERE ARE CLUES, AND PLENTY OF SUSPECTS—HERE IS

DEBUTANTE

By ROGER TORREY

Author of "Money Makes Trouble," etc.

The murder part was fine, Johnny liked that, and all the clues, break a case when he knew sure as hell this good-looking dame the handcuffs!



through the middle; Donovan's gun blasted by his ear and Stanislaus' henchman dropped his gun!

girl. Could you tell me about it?"

"There's really nothing to tell you, Sergeant. I went in the library and there the girl was, on the floor. I called Sims, the butler, and we tried to revive

her and couldn't. Sims called for my doctor then, and I saw the safe had been robbed, and called the police."

"That would be how long ago?"

"Possibly half an hour, Sergeant."

THE MOST STARTLING CRIME CONCOCTION YOU'VE EVER SET OUT TO SOLVE!

"I'm a Lieutenant, Ma'am," said Casey. "You understand I have to ask you these things. Can you tell me what was taken from the safe?"

"Approximately. What does the doctor say about the girl?"

Casey shrugged and said the doctor was still in the girl's room. Miss Wilkes looked faintly annoyed and said:

"Oh dear! This *would* have to happen right now, when I'm late. Can't you postpone this, Sergeant . . . pardon me, Lieutenant? I have an appointment and I'm already late for it."

Casey thought of the Wilkes money and the Wilkes prestige . . . and the weight both carried at the station house.

"Well," he said dubiously, "there's routine stuff we could keep busy at for a while, I guess. But it really wouldn't take you long to tell us what we should know, Miss Wilkes. Just a few minutes."

Miss Wilkes looked at a tiny wrist watch and gave Casey a brilliant smile. She said: "Please! I'll be back in not over two hours and I'll tell you all about it then."

She hurried away down the hall, confident and self-assured, and Casey stared after her with a discontented look. He'd had a choice of two evils and hoped he'd chosen the least. His Captain would certainly have things to say about him letting the main witness leave before questioning . . . and Miss Wilkes would have as surely had things to say if he'd forced her to stay for that same questioning when she'd made other plans.

And then the doctor came from the bed room, speaking over his shoulder as he closed the door behind him.

"How is she, Doctor?" Casey said.

THE doctor was a fussy looking little man and he didn't know Casey. He pulled his piped vest down over his lit-

tle paunch, looked Casey up and down, and then said:

"I presume, sir, that you're an officer."

"Yeah! Lieutenant Casey. You were already here when I got here."

"Yes, Lieutenant, I came immediately," said the doctor, sounding very proud about the matter. "I am Miss Wilkes' personal physician, you know. This girl I was called in to treat has a compound fracture. Her skull, you understand. I could give you the injury in technical terms but I doubt if you'd understand."

"I wouldn't," Casey said.

"She was struck behind the ear and slightly above it. I understand the weapon, a poker usually standing by the library fire place, was beside her. She is still unconscious and will remain that way for some time—indeed it is possible that she may never regain consciousness. In a head injury of this nature it is impossible to say . . . every case is a law unto itself."

"You going to keep her here or move her to a hospital?"

"A nurse is with her, Lieutenant. I see no reason for removing her to a hospital at this time, at least. Miss Wilkes has asked me to do everything I can for the girl."

Casey said: "White of her. I take it the blow was struck from behind?"

"Or from the side, sir. Only the girl could tell you that."

Casey thought the angle of the wound might also tell him but the point didn't seem important.

"I guess that's all then, Doctor," he said. "I was hoping she'd snap out of it long enough to tell us who hit her . . . that's what I've been waiting for."

"You'll be unable to question the girl for at least a week, Lieutenant, if then. Good day, sir."

He padded off down the hall in the same direction Miss Wilkes had taken,

and Casey watched him go, pulling at his lower lip. There'd been a robbery, but until Miss Wilkes got back from her date there was no way of finding just what had been stolen. There'd been an assault . . . the downstairs maid was just inside the bedroom he was standing by, and with a fractured skull . . . but there was no chance of hearing her story about the affair.

And then a voice from downstairs bawled: "*Casey!* I got 'm together," and Casey sighed and started for the stairs.

He'd already decided he wasn't going to like anything about the case. Miss Wilkes was very pretty and very spoiled. Casey, who had a rotten temper and brains enough to realize it, had a notion Miss Wilkes wasn't going to be an easy person for him to deal with. The maid, who apparently had interfered with the robbery of the library safe, wouldn't be able to help him; by the time she'd be able to talk the case would either be solved or too stale to break.

And Casey, though he wouldn't admit it even to himself, was more than a little awed by both Miss Wilkes and Miss Wilkes' station in the world. It wasn't Casey's world at all . . . he'd climbed from the ranks the hard way.

THE uniformed man on guard at the library door tipped a finger to his cap and said: "Lieutenant Olson's in the next room, sir. And I've got something for you maybe. . . . I just happened to be talking to the butler and he let it drop."

"What?"

"Well, Fingers Wilson has been coming here. To see the Wilkes girl. Maybe half a dozen times in all."

Casey brightened. "Was he here this morning?"

"If he was, the butler didn't see him. But he told me the library windows

weren't locked and that anybody could walk right through them. They're the kind that fasten in the middle and go clear to the floor, and they open right on the drive way. This door was open, too. Anybody could have walked in and cracked the box."

Casey said: "Keep the guy talking to you . . . he might tell you more than he will us."

And went into the next room and to Lieutenant Olson and the collection Lieutenant Olson had gathered.

There were three men and five women, as well as Olson, but the room was far too big to seem crowded. Casey gave the strangers a cursory glance and took Olson to the side and said:

"We've got something, Pete. Fingers Wilson is a friend of the family. He and the girl are pals."

Pete said: "Fingers Wilson! That louse!"

"Yeah! I'm going to phone in and put out a want on him. He's out on parole . . . they'll know where to pick him up."

Olson was tall and broad and very blond, with eyes as blue and shiny as the glaze on old China. He made a perfect contrast against Casey's dark Irish leanness. He said;

"Now wait, Johnny! Now you just wait! If Wilson and the girl are pals, maybe you ought not to do it. You remember what the skipper said? . . . to take it easy with the wench. You remember that?"

Casey said: "Look! If the girl's friendly with Fingers Wilson it means that the black-mailing . . . is putting the bee on her for something. If he's back of this job he's liable to get out of town. If he isn't, he'll hear about it and get out of town anyway. He can't stand trouble with that parole hanging over him. I want him before he has a chance to move."

"You're boss, Johnny," said Olson,

his blue eyes worried. "But look now. You make the wrong play and we'll be walking a beat so damn' long our feet will be up around our knees from the wear and tear on 'em. Maybe you ought to talk to the girl about it first, eh, Johnny?"

"She's too busy," said Casey, and went to the phone. He called the station and told the desk sergeant what he wanted, and then went back to Olson and said:

"What did you get?"

Olson nodded toward the waiting group. "Plenty. The butler. The gardener. The chauffeur. The cook. The house-keeper, though she's the butler's wife, I take it. The girl's personal maid and two others. I talked to 'em and you can too, if you want to, but they don't know a thing. The library was wide open . . . you could go into it from the hall or from outside the house. The girl that was smacked down was supposed to be in there dusting. There's no way of telling just when she got the bust on the head, so there's no way of checking on any of these people. I asked them if there'd been anybody else in the house, at about the time the thing must have happened, and they all say no. Which means it could have been anybody."

Casey sighed and said: "I suppose I've got to go over it again. As soon as they pick up Fingers, they're going to call me here. And I've got to wait for the girl to get back here anyway . . . though if they get Fingers before she gets back I'm going down to see him."

"So here we go like hell again," said Olson, cheerfully, leading the way toward the waiting group. "This is Mr. Sims, Lieutenant Casey. Mr. Sims is the butler, Johnny. Lieutenant Casey is in charge of the case, Mr. Sims. Okey, Johnny, it's all yours."

"I'm the lucky guy," Casey said.

SIMS was cold-eyed, bald-headed, and looked to be around fifty. His manner said he didn't like policemen and Casey learned exactly nothing from him. His wife was as lean and angular and forbidding and she offered equally as much help. The gardener was about the same age, shifty in manner and talk. And also as bald as a billiard ball. He knew nothing, either. The chauffeur was a grinning curly headed Italian boy named Pietro Rivvi and made a brave attempt at helping Casey . . . but unfortunately he knew no more than the others before him, which was nothing if they could be believed.

The cook was fat and buxom and Irish . . . and almost in hysterics. Her name was Nora Maloney, and outside of having a presentiment of coming death she had nothing to say that meant anything. Miss Wilkes personal maid had been shopping during the time the assault must have occurred, and neither of the other two maids, both colorless and both badly frightened, had anything to offer of any help.

This took time to go through, and Casey was thankful when the phone call he'd expected came through. The desk sergeant's gruff voice said:

"It's me, Casey. We've got Fingers for you—the boys picked him up right where he should have been. Right in his little room, and he's as innocent as a babe unborn he says."

"What did you tell him he was accused of?" Casey asked.

"We didn't. He's innocent of everything. He's just a nice clean kid trying to get along with every body and not doing a thing that's wrong. We've got him wrong, Casey."

"The hell we have!"

The desk man laughed and said: "I'm just telling you what *he* says. You coming down?"

"Right now," said Casey, hanging up the phone. He said to Olson: "I think

you'd better stick around and talk to Miss Wilkes when she gets back. Get a list of the stuff she lost and the valuation on it. You can phone it in to the Pawn Shop Detail. Tell her we've got Wilson down at the jail house and that I'm giving him the business."

Olson said: "You should talk to her. I'll get us in bad."

Casey laughed and said: "You'll do better than I would, Swede. Pass the buck to me."

CASEY was just getting into the police sedan when Constance Wilkes' convertible pulled past him up the driveway and stopped. He got out of the car and went to her, and she gave him a beaming smile and nodded at the man with her and said:

"Lieutenant Casey, this is Anton Krasvich. My fiance. Anton, Lieutenant Casey is in charge of the police. About the maid, you know."

Casey and Krasvich shook hands. Krasvich was a blond Russian . . . so blond his hair and eyebrows were almost white. He had startlingly blue eyes and a wide, candid look in them, and his cheekbones were high and his eyes were set in at a slant above them. He was as tall as Casey and wider across the shoulders.

Casey didn't like him.

He said: "Well, Miss Wilkes, we've already got something. We've got a known crook named James Wilson in custody at the station. Fingers Wilson he's called; he's a bad egg."

"I know a Mr. Wilson," said Constance Wilkes. "He sells automobiles; he's trying to sell me one now."

"The Wilson I'm talking about sells more than automobiles," Casey told her. "I'm going down to see him now . . . I'll be back right after that. Will you give Lieutenant Olson a list of the things missing from the safe, please?"

Miss Wilkes said she'd do that at

once, and Casey watched her enter the house, followed by Krasvich. He drove to the station, growling to himself about spoiled rich girls and their gigolo sweethearts, and he was in that same mood when he went back to the detention cell where James Wilson was held. He said to Wilson:

"Well, louse! I see you again."

"I'm clean, Casey," said Wilson. "This is a bum pick-up. I ain't been doing a thing; I've got a job and I'm working at it."

"Selling the Wilkes girl a car, eh?"

Wilson looked startled. "I'm trying to," he said. "But I'm going to give to you. It ain't the car only. I'm doing a little business for her on the side. If I make out, I get a grand for myself and on top of that she buys a car. That'd put me in good on my job."

"What's this outside business?"

Wilson said earnestly: "Now look, Casey! It's going to sound wrong, but it's right. The gal wrote some letters and the guy she wrote 'em to lost 'em."

"Who was the guy?"

"Mike Stanislaus. I was the go-between. You see, Casey, I'm leveling with you. I know it was blackmail and that it puts me in a spot, but I'm telling you the truth just the same. You see?"

Casey said: "That's what I don't get. Why should you? What d'ya make by it?"

"I'm on parole—I figure the girl ain't enough heel to see me stuck for doing a favor for her. I know damn' well you'll try and have my parole revoked; I figure she'll take up my end and that you won't make it stick."

Casey reddened and said: "We'll see about it. And damn' soon!"

And then a jailer came down the hall and said: "It's a gal named Wilkes, with a lawyer. She's got a writ for this guy. She's got a bondsman with her, too, and the lawyer is getting bail set. I'm to take him out front."

Wilson grinned and said: "You see, Casey? Didn't I call it?"

Casey growled: "You did for now. But now ain't going to last forever."

MISS WILKES was wearing a triumphant little smile, and now had Allen Crowthers, a very good criminal lawyer, Abe Levy, equally as well known as a bondsman, in tow as well as Krasvich, her fiance. She said to Casey:

"I felt that Mr. Wilson shouldn't be held in jail, just because he was unfortunate enough to sell me a car, or try to, rather."

"I just talked to him," Casey said. "He told me that . . . and more. I'm afraid I'll have to talk with you, Miss Wilkes, about what he told me."

Miss Wilkes said: "Mr. Crowthers and I will be glad to discuss anything with you, Lieutenant."

Casey said nothing more. He had a distinct recollection of what his Captain had told him about going easy with the Wilkes girl . . . and her tone and her mention of having her lawyer with her during his proposed talk with her meant even more. It meant that the Wilkes money and prestige was allied against him . . . and in that argument, he, Casey, was certain to come out loser. He watched Wilson led out; watched him leave, escorted by the lawyer and the bondsman, and then Krasvich dropped back by him and said:

"It's none of my affair, Lieutenant, really, but I believe you should know this. Miss Wilkes would never tell you, I'm sure . . . she believes in protecting the people working for her at all cost. But the gardener's stepson has a police record; I understand he has served time for breaking and entering and robbery . . . the same sort of crime committed in Miss Wilkes house."

"The hell you say!" said Casey. "We'd have got to it in time, but thanks

for telling me."

"I thought you should know," Krasvich said, going back to Miss Wilkes' side. They left, following Wilson and his helpers, and Casey got Olson on the Wilkes phone. He said:

"Pick up the gardener's stepson and send him down. And I'm sending a police ambulance up for that maid—I think I want her in the police hospital instead of up there. I'll have a medico go up with the ambulance . . . he'll see that it's safe to move her."

"Why is all this?" Olson asked. "I got the list of the missing stuff from that dame and the Hock Shop Squad's looking it up now. They're giving all the hock shops a list to watch for. Now why all this?"

Casey said: "I've got reasons. Wilson is in this up to his neck, and the girl just bailed him out. I want that maid kept safe. And I want the gardener's stepson brought in because he's got a record. It won't do any harm to talk to him."

Olson said, "You're the boss!" in a gloomy voice. "That gal ain't any help. She claims there's about sixty thousand bucks worth of jewelry gone but all her worrying she says she's leaving up to the cops and the insurance company."

Casey grunted and hung up the phone. He hadn't expected any co-operation from the Wilkes girl and wasn't surprised when he found he was getting none.

THE gardener's stepson turned out to be a weedy youth of around twenty—and he had a record that did no credit to his years. He'd spent three of the four years before he'd turned eighteen in various reform schools . . . and he'd broken even on the two years after that. He'd put in one in jail and one out. His name was Henry Wiggins, and he had a shifty eye and an air of snivelling defiance.

He said to Casey: "You can't hold me, copper. You ain't got nothing on me."

Casey said: That's just for now. I'll end up with something on you, laddy. Some cop always has."

"The Wilkes girl will get me sprung, when pop talks to her. You watch and see."

Casey thought there probably was a lot of truth in this and so didn't argue. He started questioning young Wiggins about what he'd done since last released from jail, and he was doing this when a uniformed man came in the room and said:

"Hey, Lieutenant! It's the skipper! He says to put this monkey back in his cage. Fingers Wilson was just picked up all shot to hell."

"Dead?"

"Top of his head gone. I'll take this dope back where he belongs, if you like."

"You do that," said Casey. "This is getting bigger and better by the minute."

Miss Constance Wilkes said: "Certainly I can tell you about Mr. Wilson. We left him in front of the court-house. He had some business to attend to. He was to call here tonight."

"What sort of business?"

"My own," said Miss Wilkes, looking outraged. "I question your right to ask me that."

Casey said: "You do that. You go right ahead. Wilson's dead. Murdered. And it so happens that he told me what he was doing for you. Now I want to hear about it from you."

"I'll call Mr. Crowthers."

"He'll tell you the same thing," said Casey. "This is getting out of hand. It started with simple assault and robbery. However, we don't think it's that now. There's blackmail mixed in it now. There's an out and out gang killing in it now; Wilson was taken for a ride.

Somebody held a gun against his head and turned loose. Your lawyer will tell you to talk. If you don't, I'll tell what I know to the papers. Wilson told me he was go-between between you and somebody holding some of your letters. If I can't get information from you I'll smoke it out some other way."

"That sounds like a threat, Lieutenant."

Casey said: "It's nothing else."

Miss Wilkes thought about this and apparently made up her mind. She suddenly gave Casey a beaming smile and said:

"I'm being childish, aren't I? It's just habit . . . you're the first person in a long time who's talked to me like that and it angered me. What is it you'd like to know, Lieutenant?"

"Who had the letters? I'll keep it quiet, you understand."

"Mr. Wilson wouldn't tell me. He didn't think I should know."

"He told *me*," said Casey, "though Fingers Wilson would lie when the truth would have served him better, at any and all times."

Olson broke in with: "It don't sound like Mike Stanislaus, much. I always figured Mike as strictly strong arm."

"Did Mr. Wilson tell you about him?" Miss Wilkes asked Casey. "I mean about this man Stanislaus having the letters?"

"Sure," said Casey. "But he was such a liar I had to check on it. Yeah, he told me the whole thing."

Miss Wilkes looked thoughtful. Olson said: "Well, we'll pick up Mike and take him down and give him the works."

"You can't do that," Miss Wilkes said. "He'll make my letters public, then. There must be some other way of handling it. After all, you don't *know* he killed Mr. Wilson."

Casey said, in a reasoning voice:

"Now look, Miss Wilkes. Fingers Wilson was in a jam, and if he was pushed he'd tell us about his deal with Mike. He already did, but Mike didn't know that, of course. Mike got panicky and killed, or had him killed. That way he figured Wilson couldn't drag him into the thing. Mike's the logical suspect. He's tough enough for murder not to mean a thing to him, too. I thought, from what Wilson said, that he'd gotten back your letters for you."

"Only part of them."

"Wilson and Stanislaus were probably working together on it," said Olson. "Wilson probably was back of the whole thing and just *said* Stanislaus had the letters. The same reason would hold good for Mike killing him."

Miss Wilkes stood and said: "I'd say it was up to the police to find out about it. The only thing is, I want no notoriety. And oh yes, Lieutenant! I'm arranging with Mr. Crowthers to get young Wiggins out of jail. You know, my gardener's stepson. It's outrageous, his being arrested like that for no reason."

She left, and Olson said: "A lot of help she's turning out to be!"

Casey said: "Now I wouldn't say that. She's said a lot that meant something, Swede. For one thing, she's lying to us. Mike Stanislaus never went in for blackmail in his life. That's not his racket and he's smart enough to know it. So she had a reason for naming him, whatever it was."

"But what?" Olson argued. "Why should she tell you Mike Stanislaus if it was somebody else?"

Casey shrugged and said he didn't know that as yet.

MIKE STANISLAUS ran a saloon, though it was admittedly nothing but a blind for his real mission in life. He'd made a profession out of the strong arm trade . . . and rated highly

in his field. He was short and ape-like, with an egg-shaped head that was freckled and bald, and he'd never struck Casey as looking like anything human. He was entirely good-natured except in a business way, and he had a hoarse and husky rasp that sounded little like a voice.

Casey walked in the bar and said: "Hi, Mike! Want to see you," and Stanislaus turned from the cash register and said:

"Hagh, you, Casey! Always in my hair you are."

He moved out from behind the bar and motioned Casey to a booth that commanded a view of the same cash register.

"It's my brother-in-law, the rat—I!" he explained. "So help me! For every nickel that goes in that damper, a dime goes in his pockets. He's a thieving rat—"

"Why keep him then?"

Stanislaus sighed and said: "You never met my old lady, I see plain, Casey. Now what the hell d'ya say I been doing that I'm innocent of as a child in the cradle. Hey?"

Casey said, in a reproving voice: "Mike, you should stick to your own racket. You never should have changed. Now I've got you on the Wilkes deal."

"I read the papers," Stanislaus said. "I never even *seen* that maid that was bopped. That maid and me was strangers. . . . I never seen her in my life."

"What about the Wilkes girl's letters?"

"*What* letters?"

"The letters you've got of hers."

Stanislaus said earnestly: "Look, Casey, you got me wrong. I don't know nothing about any letters. What in hell would I do with letters? I don't know this Wilkes girl, either. I know the son of a guy that works for the dame and I say it right out. It's a punk that's

named Wiggins, and his stepfather's the gardener for the dame. I know the kid on account of me giving him a job swamping out the joint here once . . . only he quit me. So why should you come and talk foolishness to *me*?"

"That's all you know about it, eh, Mike?"

"So help me."

"Why'd Wilson tell me you were the one that had her letters?"

"How in hell do *I know*?"

"Wilson's dead now."

"And good riddance," said Stanislaus. "He was a no-good. A strictly no-good. He was just giving her a story—he always hated my guts, the guy did."

"It could be that," said Casey, doubtfully. "He might have just told her your name because he had to give her somebody's. Only I don't think so."

"I wouldn't lie to you, Casey," said Stanislaus. "You know I wouldn't lie to a copper."

Casey laughed, and in a moment Stanislaus joined him. Casey said: "You'd rather lie than tell the truth. I wouldn't leave town, Mike."

"Why not?"

"We'd have to bring you back," Casey said. "And I wouldn't want to go to that bother."

Stanislaus declared: "For you, Casey, I'll stay right here."

HENRY WIGGINS was out of jail by the time Casey got back there. Olson said: "She did it, just like she said she would. Crowthers, her lawyer, came down with Levy, and fixed bail. The kid got out and I put a tag on him."

"That's right," said Casey.

"And here he comes now," Olson said, staring. "I had Donovan on him, and here's Donovan and the punk right now."

Casey turned, and saw Detective-Sergeant Donovan, shackled by a wrist to Henry Wiggins. Wiggins looked as

though he was about ready to break into tears. Donovan said:

"This guy's just plain stupid. I kept behind him and he goes home, after Levy puts up bail money for him. I wait outside. By and by he comes out and, so help me, he beats it down to Abrams' and hocks a watch that's got diamonds and sapphires set in it. Part of the stuff taken from the Wilkes girl's safe. I took him over then."

"Was the watch on the list she gave you of what was missing?" Casey asked Olson, and Olson produced a typed list and said:

"You bet. Valued at twelve hundred bucks."

"What did Abrams give him for it?"

"Two fifty. I waited until the deal was through. . . . Abrams will testify to it," Donovan said.

Henry Wiggins said: "Miss Wilkes will straighten this out. You watch and see. Can I telephone her?"

Casey wanted to say no, but he knew that the Wilkes girl would surely find out in time that young Wiggins was again in jail, and the memory of what his Captain had said about antagonizing the girl was still fresh in his mind. He growled to Donovan:

"Take him to a phone. Then book him for possession of stolen property. That'll hold him for now."

Young Wiggins said: "It won't for long. You wait and see."

Casey said: "And Donovan! If you hear any more of that sort of lip from the punk, you see he makes a mistake and falls down some steps or something. Don't mark him up *too* much, is all."

He grinned wickedly as Donovan led his prisoner away and to a phone, and said to Olson: "I get tired of being told something I know. Of *course* the gal will get him out. She thinks we're playing games with her."

"We pinch 'em and she bails 'em out," said Olson, gloomily. "It's a gag."

AND so it proved to be. Miss Wilkes was at the station inside of an hour, and she again had Crowthers, the lawyer, with her. She listened to what Sergeant Donovan had to say, then said crisply:

"I think you'd better turn him loose. I gave him that watch to pawn. It so happens his mother is sick and he needed the money for her. You can check that for yourselves, gentlemen."

Olson sounded outraged. He said: "Now listen, Miss Wilkes. Right here on the list you gave me, that watch is listed. Right here. Donovan got him dead to rights, hocking it."

The girl said: "I made a mistake. That's all. I shouldn't have included the watch in the list of things stolen. Are you going to release Wiggins or not?"

"What else can we do?" asked Casey. "Miss Wilkes, I don't believe you understand how serious this is. Your maid is in a bad way . . . she may not live. Another man was shot and killed over this . . . that's deliberate murder. This in addition to a robbery. And now, instead of helping us, you're doing the opposite."

Miss Wilkes said: "I see no reason for persecuting an innocent boy. I tell you I gave him that watch to pawn. What more do you want?"

Casey gave orders that released Henry Wiggins, and watched Wiggins, Crowthers, and Constance Wilkes leave the station. He didn't look happy about seeing them together.

Olson said: "Cheer up! It'll go down in history as another unsolved crime and what the hell when it does. She's just the same as saying she don't want any action on it. Let's go out and eat, then go home; we just work here, not live here."

"We'll be back before the night's over," said Casey, gloomily. "This thing is building up in great shape. It's

getting bigger and better all the time."

Olson said: "She had insurance on that stuff, didn't she?"

"Sure," said Casey.

Olson said: "Then I'm going to let the insurance company do the worrying. There's no sense in *everybody* getting upset about it. As far as Fingers Wilson is concerned, it's a good thing he *was* knocked off."

"There's the maid," Casey said. "I don't think she's going to make it. The doctor don't give her too much of a chance."

"That *does* make it different," Olson said. "I guess she just got in the way."

Casey said: "I'm going to be in somebody's way, too. You watch and see."

CASEY was just nicely asleep when the phone by his bed jangled, and he reached for it and said:

"Yeah! It's Casey speaking."

The bored voice at the other end said: "I'm switching this call to you, Lieutenant. It's from the Wilkes place, and you said you wanted to keep in touch there. Go ahead, please."

And then Casey heard a frightened voice that carried so much brogue he had difficulty in understanding it. The voice said:

"Oh dear God! And is it you, Lieutenant Casey?"

"Casey speaking."

"And 'tis murdered in our beds we'll be this night, Lieutenant. Ah, man, can't you be coming here and save us?"

"Who's this?" Casey asked.

"Who but Nora Maloney? Lieutenant, there are people here. Skulking people, hiding in the bushes, Lieutenant. With my own eyes I've seen them, man."

"Where are you?" asked the practical Casey.

"Where but in my own little house?" said Nora Maloney.

Casey remembered then that some of

the Wilkes servants had been quartered in small detached cottages at the back of the Wilkes plot. He hadn't noted just who stayed in these because it hadn't seemed of importance at the time.

He said: "You stay inside. . . . I'll be right out. Are you alone?"

The voice held reproof now. "And why shouldn't I be, Lieutenant? I'm a decent woman, I'll have you know."

Casey said again that he'd be there right away, and started dressing. He thought that in all likelihood, Nora Maloney's imagination was in full swing and that the supposed prowler was a thing of dreams, but the case held enough fascination for him not to begrudge the work involved in tracing down any possible lead.

And, after all there was a possibility of Nora Maloney being right in her suspicions.

CONSTANCE WILKES lived in a house set well back from the roadway . . . and the cottage Nora Maloney occupied was back of this, against the fence that circled the property. It was one of three and on the right hand end of the little row. The grounds were landscaped and a hedge served to separate the small houses from the main one . . . and the hedge turned at the corner and ran up the side fencing to cover the front of the garage and dog kennels that made up the sum of the outbuildings.

Casey went down this fence cautiously, though the kenneled dogs were raising such a din that silence wasn't needed. Miss Wilkes raised beagles, and Casey decided that the little hounds had voices all out of proportion to their size. He passed the first of the three houses, thought he saw a movement past the third, and he stopped and half-crouched then, trying to outline what he'd seen against the top of the edge.

And then somebody landed across his shoulders and he went face down into the sod that had deadened his footsteps.

The somebody was swinging a sap of some kind and doing it enthusiastically. Casey took one cut on the side of the head and thought his ear had been torn loose from its mounting. He ducked the second blow by luck alone, not knowing when it was coming nor where it was aimed, and his shoulder took the brunt of it. And then he got an arm back and up, and caught his opponent by the front of a coat.

And then he heaved, rolling at the same time, and the man came sliding over him and to where Casey could get both hands in action.

The trouble in this was that the unknown also had more freedom. His next try with the sap numbed Casey's left forearm. Casey swung with his good right hand at a face which was nothing but a blur . . . and he missed. He opened his fist and brought his hand back, trying to catch the man by the back of the neck, but the man ducked and Casey's hand slid over a bald head, knocking off the man's hat as it did.

And then Casey got the sap laid solidly on his jaw and went out of the picture.

HE came out of it with Nora Maloney bending over him . . . but he didn't know it was Nora until he'd gotten his hands on her and listened to her outraged cries. She straightened herself, shaking her clothes into place like a ruffled hen while mentioning that Casey was no gentleman, and Casey said:

"I'm sorry. I snapped out of it thinking you were the guy that sapped me."

Nora Maloney said he should be ashamed and Casey said he was all of that. And that no man in his right senses could mistake a lovely woman like Miss Maloney for a man.

Miss Maloney said, much mollified: "I heard the fracas, Mr. Casey. You were cursing terribly bad, man, and I waited until you'd stopped before I came out of my house."

"Did you see the guy that sapped me?"

"Surely I did. A giant, he was. You should feel no shame, Mr. Casey . . . he was as big as four of you."

Casey sighed and decided Miss Maloney was again trusting to her imagination. He prowled the rest of the grounds, this time with a flashlight, and found no one. He went back to his hotel, sore in body and spirit . . . and before he went to bed he called Olson and woke him to answer the call.

Olson mentioned this. He said, in a fretful voice: "It's a hell of a note! Can't I sleep?"

Casey said: "I went up to the Wilkes girl's place just now and got sapped. The guy did a real job on me; I'm black and blue all over."

"Who was it?" Olson asked.

"All I know is that he had a bald head. I felt it. He almost broke my arm and my jaw."

Olson said thoughtfully: "Now that's a help, Johnny. Only thing is, the butler's bald and so is the gardener. And so is Mike Stanislaus. So all you got to do is figure which one of them it was."

"That's all," Casey said.

AND that was all until around three o'clock the following afternoon. And then Detective-Sergeant Donovan hurried into the office Casey and Olson shared and said:

"I lost the Wiggins guy. He got away from me two hours ago. . . . I trailed him for a while but I was in a hack and he was in a car and the cabby couldn't keep it in sight."

Casey took his feet from his desk and said: "What was the license number of the car? You got it, didn't you?"

Donovan mopped at his forehead and said: "Hell, yes! It was a car that was stolen just about that time. The report came in while I was checking the numbers. And I swear the guy didn't get in the car because he wanted to . . . he was walking along and the car pulled up by him and stopped. I was half a block back, but I flagged a cab. And then the cabby lost him. It looked to me like somebody in the car was holding a gun on the guy—he went into the car like he was going to the dentist's."

Casey said: "Well, maybe we can pick him up again. But I don't like it. I've got a notion where we'll do the picking up."

"Where?" asked Donovan, innocently. "We could stake out the place."

"I just don't know which ditch it'll be," Casey explained.

AND Casey was right. Henry Wiggins' body was found in a ditch all right . . . but the ditch was a full hundred miles from town, and by the time identification had been made and the body brought back to the morgue; and by the time the post mortem had been made and the three .38 calibre slugs that had caused Wiggins' death had been removed from his head, it was nine o'clock the following morning and Casey and Olson had gone farther behind on their sleep. Casey said grimly:

"To hell with the Wilkes girl and what trouble she can make us. I'm getting a warrant this morning . . . right now . . . and I'm going through that place. And I'm getting one for Mike Stanislaus' joint right along with it."

Olson said: "You don't know that Mike's got anything to do with it, Johnny. There's been nothing to show that he is."

"There's been nothing to show that either the butler or the gardener are in it, either," Casey said. "All I know is that the guy I was wrestling around

with had a bald head and that all three of them haven't got any hair."

"That girl's going to raise hell if you go into her place with a warrant," Olson said dubiously. "She's going to take off like a rocket."

"She'd never let us go through the place without one, Swede."

"And you won't find out anything by going through Mike Stanislaus' place, either. He's too smart to have anything hot around. You know that."

"It'll worry him," said Casey. "And that's what I want to do. We can't lose by it."

Olson sighed: "Well, you're the boss," and waited in the office while Casey went after the search warrants.

He said to Casey, without much hope: "I could be shaking down Stanislaus while you go up to the Wilkes place, Johnny. It'd save time."

"You that scared of her?" asked Casey.

Olson said honestly: "I am. She'll be sore as a boil about this."

Casey said: "Okey, Swede! You go to Stanislaus' then. You'll scare him as much as if both of us went. And let him see we're after him."

Olson left, grinning at being relieved from the Wilkes search, and Casey picked up Donovan and started out. He said to the Wilkes girl, after nodding at Anton Krasvich, who was with her:

"I'm sorry, but it's got to be done. The warrant's legal . . . the Judge was satisfied with the reason I gave him for asking for it."

Miss Wilkes snapped: "Then I'll go with you, Lieutenant. I've heard too much about how you police officers frame innocent people. Come along, Anton."

Casey said: "Glad to have company," and motioned for Donovan to follow. Miss Wilkes led the way to the same row of cabins in the back, and said:

"The first is the gardener's. Wiggins. I think it's a fine thing—they're heartbroken over the death of Henry, as you know. And now you must annoy them in this manner."

Casey shrugged and didn't answer. He knocked at the door, and when the gardener's bald head showed in the opening he said:

"Sorry, but I want to look around."

"To hell with you," said the gardener, and tried to close the door and found he couldn't because of Casey's foot being in the way.

CASEY said wearily: "I'd have to run into a stupid!" and shoved the door and the gardener back . . . and Donovan and the Wilkes girl and Krasvich followed him inside. The gardener said:

"If you find anything here, it was put here by my stepson. It don't mean a thing."

"That's right, Wiggins," said Miss Wilkes.

Casey said: "Look, Miss. I've had just about all of this I'm going to stand. Another crack like that and I'm going to charge you with obstructing an officer while in the performance of his duties. I may not make it stick and I may catch hell for it but I'll see it gets the proper notoriety. Now what? . . . d'ya let me work or do you make me trouble?"

Krasvich said: "The man's right, Connie. He's just doing his job . . . or what he thinks is his job. He can't help it if he's stupid and crude."

Casey said: "Donovan, don't let me forget. When I get back to the station I want to have the boys look up this Mr. Fancy Pants' record. Even if we don't find anything, I'll let the papers know he's being investigated by the police."

"You wouldn't dare!" said Miss Wilkes.

Casey said: "And I can work the same gag with you, Miss, too. I'll probably be fired anyway . . . what's the harm in having some fun before I am. Donovan, you look through the boy's room . . . and I'll look through the rest of the place."

It was then that Krasvich swung for Casey's head and he made an error in so doing. He knew nothing of boxing and led with his right, and that's bad form in any league. Casey, who was police trained, warded the blow away with his left forearm and hit Krasvich in the belly with a solid right, and Krasvich grunted and put his hands down. Then Casey clipped him on the chin with a left hook and Krasvich sat down on the floor, now with one hand to his jaw and the other still on his middle. He didn't try to get up.

Casey said: "I've been looking ahead to that. Get up and try it again and I'll give you the first sock free."

"You dirty brute!" said Miss Wilkes.

Krasvich was still trying to get his breath and so said nothing, but Donovan said: "I'll get at it, Johnny. You ain't slipped a bit."

Casey said: "Thanks!" and started going through the room, heading toward another door, and Miss Wilkes picked up a copy of *"Gone With The Wind"* and heaved it at him.

It missed Casey's head and he picked it up and handed it back to her and said politely: "You shouldn't have done that, Miss Wilkes. That's a heavy book."

Miss Wilkes said: "Damn you!" and turned away and left the house, and Krasvich picked himself up from the floor and followed her. Mrs. Wiggins came out of the room Casey had started to enter, her eyes red from crying, and Casey said:

"I'm sorry about this, Mrs. Wiggins. It's part of my job."

Then Donovan called from the room

pointed out as that of young Henry's: "Hey! I've found something."

THEY ended back at the station with a small diamond in an old-fashioned ring setting and a brooch as dated . . . this from the Wiggins home. And with a bracelet and ear rings taken from the butler's domicile. All told, the entire value of the stolen property recovered was less than five hundred dollars, and Olson pointed this out with:

"Well, you got something, anyway . . . I didn't find a thing at Stanislaus' place. That stuff you got isn't worth much, but it was down on that list she gave me of stuff that was stolen."

Casey said: "Yeah! It's all wrong. And I just got word from the hospital that the maid died. She never regained consciousness . . . she just kept getting lower and lower and she died about an hour ago."

"What did Miss Wilkes say?" asked Olson.

Casey's face hardened and he pointed toward an extension phone. He said: "Get on that and listen. I'm going to call her right now."

He gave the number to the police operator, talked to a maid for a moment, and then when he heard Miss Constance Wilkes cool voice, he said:

"This is Lieutenant Casey, Miss Wilkes. I'm afraid you're pretty sore at me, but I've finally got some good news for you. Your maid is now well enough to be moved . . . we're sending her up to where her folks live, tonight. In an ambulance of course. She comes from a little place up-state . . . a place called Riverside, about sixty miles from here."

He listened a moment, then said: "That's right. She'll leave the hospital in about an hour, they tell me. Naturally, her people want her."

He listened a moment more and then hung up the phone, and when he saw the amazed look on Olson's face he said:

"It's going to work out. And Swede! . . . you get in touch with the guys that are checking the hock shops and tell 'em to start checking back on that stuff on the list. Not to pay any attention to the stuff put in hock after that robbery but to go back for months. Tell 'em to check the better places first."

Olson said slowly: "Like that, eh? I get it. But how you going to work it out."

Casey laughed and said: "You'll see. You'll be following me and you'll have a grandstand seat for it."

CASEY rode in comfort on the stretcher bed in the ambulance and watched Donovan take off the white jacket he'd worn to represent an interne while leaving the hospital. Through the glass panel in the back door he could watch for following headlights, and he watched these bob into sight and sweep past him while Donovan said:

"They may wait until we get up to Riverside instead of stopping us on the road."

"Then they'd be taking a chance on us having help from the local law up there," Casey pointed out. "If they stop us on the road, they'll think they've got a cinch. All they'll expect will be a driver and an interne."

"It sounds all right," said Donovan. "I saw Olson blink his lights a couple of times back there; he's still with us."

"He wants to be in at the finish," Casey said grinning. "Oh, oh! This may be it."

They watched a following car swerve in toward them and Donovan snapped out: "It is it! Watch it, Johnny."

Casey was braced for a crash and they avoided one only by the skill of the police driver. The heavy sedan that started to pass them cut in at an angle, and the ambulance brakes screamed and it teetered on the shoulder of the road but managed to keep upright. The

sedan slid in ahead and stopped, and Mike Stanislaus and two others came out of it in a hurry, guns out in sight, and Stanislaus turned his on the ambulance driver and said:

"Get out of there, guy!"

The driver had been driving with a gun on his lap. He opened the door on the side away from Stanislaus and jumped—and Casey threw open the door of the ambulance and hit the road at the same time. He called:

"Stanislaus! Drop it!"

Stanislaus turned, shooting, and he was outlined against the ambulance lights. Casey shot him once through the middle and again, when he didn't fall. Donovan's gun blasted by his ear, and the first of the two men with Stanislaus took a jiggling little step and sat down. The third man dropped his gun as though it was burning his hand and said:

"Don't shoot! Don't shoot!"

The police driver had gone down the ditch and circled the Stanislaus sedan. He called to Casey:

"Those three are all! This is empty."

And then Olson ground to a stop behind the ambulance and dashed out of his car . . . and he looked at the two men on the ground and the one standing with his hands in the air and said:

"It's all over."

He sounded disappointed about it.

MISS WILKES objected to being awakened at that hour and said so. Emphatically. And Casey grinned at her and nodded toward the stocky woman he'd brought with him, and said: "That's all right, Miss Wilkes. You can catch up your sleep in jail, after the D. A. talks to you a bit. I brought a matron with me to help you dress. Now run along like a good girl now."

Miss Wilkes said: "You must be crazy!"

Casey kept his grin. "You were,

Baby, when you smacked the maid. And the funny part of it is, you didn't have to do it. We'd have taken your word for the robbery . . . you didn't have to sneak up behind her and knock her out to make it look good. If it hadn't been for that we'd probably just made a routine check on the pawn shops and let the thing go at that."

"I—I don't know what you're talking about."

"It's simple," said Casey. "You'd lost most of your money and the stuff you'd been pawning was insured. You figured you could stick the insurance company for a fake robbery . . . and you knocked the maid on the head to make it look good. The hock shop guys are in with the thieves lots of times and you happened to pick one of that kind. He told Wilson and Wilson started to shake you down for it. So you had to get rid of him. You knew the gardener's stepson had a record and would know some strong arm man, so you got Mike Stanislaus working for you through the young guy. Mike killed Wilson . . . which was that you paid him to do. He was open for the job; he and Wilson hated each other. You got Wilson out of jail, so Mike could get at him."

"This is ridiculous," said Miss Wilkes. She was trying to sound as though she believed herself and it wasn't at all well done.

"And then the kid started getting ideas of his own . . . so you got Mike to knock him off in turn. We just got Mike and one of his boys . . . and we've got another one down at the station just singing his head off."

Miss Wilkes said: "This is ridiculous. You know yourself that you found some of the stolen property in the room young Wiggins had. And more of it in Sims', the butler's, place. I'd suggest you talk to Wiggin's stepfather and the butler."

"And that was another mistake," Casey said gently. "You were planting the stuff on too many people. You were getting in our way instead of helping us. I ran into Stanislaus, when he was trying to get young Wiggins, and he sapped me out. But I had a notion it was him at the time."

Olson said honestly: "I never knew why, either, Johnny."

Casey said: "The guy that landed on my back was one tough baby. Too tough to be working as a gardener or a butler. Suppose you go along with the matron and get dressed, Miss Wilkes. The D. A. is waiting for you at the station."

Miss Wilkes tossed her head and said: "I can straighten out any trouble with the insurance company. They'll make no charges . . . I can arrange that. I've enough property to handle them."

"It won't be the insurance company," Casey said. "It'll be the State. It's murder. When you hired Mike Stanislaus to kill Wilson and young Wiggins, it put you down for second degree. When the maid died tonight it ran it up to first. And they burn you in this state for first degree murder."

Miss Wilkes said faintly: "But . . . but you told me the maid would be all right."

"Sure," said Casey. "And then you told that to Stanislaus and got him to make sure she *wouldn't* be all right. That's just another count against you. It's your own fault . . . you're the one that started it."

The matron said: "Come on, girlie! Let's get your clothes on."

Olson said: "I didn't get that last crack. What did you mean when you said she started it?"

"She started lying to me," Casey explained. "So I started lying right back at her. What's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander, isn't it?"

THE MAN WHO HALLOWED HOMICIDE

By LAWRENCE TREAT

Author of "Case of the Blushing Butcher," etc.

*The nasty little guy with the gun snarled, and
shoved the gun hard against my spine.*



I WAS on my way out to get the best lunch you can buy for a dime when I heard a horn toot and I saw that canary yellow roadster with brown trim. All it needed was a show window and a cellophane wrapper built around it.

This Davidson guy was driving it, of course.

He called out, "Hello, Jimmy. Hop in."

I looked at him and at the roadster and then I felt the milled edge of the dime. I decided in favor of the dime.

"No want," I said.

He tried to laugh it off. "Don't be like that, Jimmy. I was just on my way down to see you. Business."

He was holding up traffic and a lot of cars were blowing their horns and the cop at the corner blasted his whistle and yelled and started to walk over. Rex Davidson didn't pay the slightest attention. There were possibilities to the situation, so I opened the door and got in.

It slammed shut just as the cop went into action.

"Who the hell do you think you are?" he demanded. "Wise guy, sitting there and waiting for the show to start, huh?" His book came out and he got ready to write the ticket. Rex has lots of them; one more and he loses his driving license.

"This guy," I cut in, nodding

*Give the heel credit . . . murder was something he knew money
couldn't buy!*

at Davidson, "has more millions than you got buttons on your uniform. Settle for a hundred, officer, and then give him the ticket besides. He wouldn't play square with you, anyhow."

The cop put his hands on his hips. "Who are you and who asked for your two cents?"

He was eight cents off on that one. I said, "I'm Jimmy Fortune, and this guy's name is Davidson and I'm telling you. He's good for a hundred."

The cop said, "Oh," from which it was clear he'd heard of me. I'm an investigator. Damn good one, too, and fees reasonable. 619 Maritime Building, hours nine to five and don't disturb me at home. I write up my cases as true crime articles and dish it out straight, including the police force, which makes some of them pals and others hate my guts.

This particular cop seemed to know about me but couldn't make up his mind which side he was on.

"Come on, Rex," I coaxed. "Peel off a hundred."

The only thing I can say in this Davidson guy's favor is that sometimes he knows enough to do what I tell him. So he took out his roll and separated one of the century notes.

I grabbed it and said to the cop, "Fifty-fifty. Drop up to my office later on and you'll get yours."

He glared at this Davidson dummy. "Come on," he bellowed. "Get moving! Think you own them streets?"

Rex Davidson stepped on the gas.

I don't like him and he knows it. I've tried to shake him off, but it's no go. And besides, a man has to live and Davidson was made to support his betters, and I try to get my share.

"So you came on business," I remarked.

He looked at me. He has curly blond hair and innocent blue eyes and a dumb look that would make him a fortune if

he were a chorus girl.

"Jimmy," he said tensely, "somebody's trying to kill me!"

"Again? And you want me between you and the bullet, as usual. Well, if there's money in it I'd rather work for the guy that's trying to bump you. Know who he is?"

He stopped the car—in the middle of the street, of course—and put his hand on my arm. He looked scared. Really scared.

"All right," I sighed. "If you want me to help, you know what. The re-tainer's five hundred."

"Two hundred," he said. He's never too scared to argue about that.

"No soap," I said, opening the door. "Five, and I don't bargain."

HE grabbed my shoulder and pulled me back. Then he took out the wad and handed me five one-hundred dollar bills. Just like that.

I said, "Park over there near the curb, and then tell me about it."

He left the middle of the street and stopped in front of the only hydrant on the block. He took a cigarette from his platinum case and lit it with his gold lighter, but his hand was trembling. "Jimmy," he began shakily. "The most peculiar and horrible thing happened yesterday. I'd stopped in at a cafeteria and there was a girl at the next table. Attractive, too. Dark hair, dark eyes, smooth skin. I kept looking at her. She was alone, though an old lady was sitting at the same table. Maybe that's why the girl wouldn't smile at me."

"Sure. Otherwise she'd have broken down and cried. Sometimes you affect me that way, too."

He puffed nervously at his cigarette. "After a while the old lady dropped a glove and stooped to pick it up, but she sort of groaned and held her side and then she asked the girl to get it for her. While the girl was bending down, the

old lady dropped something in the girl's coffee."

"What did you do?"

"Followed the girl when she left."

"Always the hero!" I muttered. "What next?"

"The old woman followed too, and about three blocks from the restaurant the girl suddenly keeled over and fainted. The woman got there first and held her head, and a small crowd gathered. Then a cop came. The old lady said the girl was her niece and if somebody'd call a taxi she'd take the girl home. Then I pushed through and started to tell the policeman what I'd seen. The old lady got excited and I must have pushed against her. I knocked off her hat, and a wig came off with it. Jimmy, she was a man!"

"No kidding!" I said. "Did they get him?"

"No. It was growing dark and he escaped. But I'd seen him put that tablet in the girl's coffee and I knew what he looked like. And last night on my way home somebody fired at my car and made two big dents in the door. Ruined the appearance, Jimmy. That's why I had to go out and buy this thing today." He tapped at the steering wheel.

"That's tough," I said, "having to buy a new car."

Rex nodded solemnly. "Well, when I got home, I got an anonymous phone call. Somebody said the shots were just to show they meant business and that I'd get it personally if I mentioned the incident of the old lady. Jimmy, they'll kill me! I don't want to die, Jimmy. What'll I do?"

"Told the police?"

"Of course not. I was warned not to."

There was a drugstore a couple of doors away. I figured the police would know about any white slave gang that operated in the way this Davidson guy

had described, and that with the threats there'd be plenty of reason to pick them up.

I went into the drugstore and called Jenks. Sergeant Jenks. The biggest and dumbest guy on the whole force. He's so dumb that he's brave. I figured he could handle this practically in the line of routine. So I called to tell him Rex's story. I figured it would be the easiest five hundred I ever made. But I never even got my connection.

The nasty little guy with the gun snarled, "So you're in this, huh? Kid Fortune. We kind of figured it."

"Looks like I have a reputation," I remarked.

The nasty little guy pushed tight against me in the booth and nodded. "And that's why you got bumped."

I didn't like that "got." I said, "If you want to kill anybody, why not pick this Davidson guy?"

"Because the cops would crack right down on us. They know he's a witness and they'd get us, eventually."

There was something deadly and horrible about this little guy. I felt as if I were locked in a closet with a rattlesnake. My spine kept jerking and I knew I didn't have a chance.

"Listen," I said, "if I were you, here's how my mind would work. I'd ask myself what I had to lose by playing along with this Fortune guy, and—"

"You talk too much," he said, and lifted the gun.

And fired.

THE shot sounded like a thunderclap in the telephone booth. I jumped a mile. I saw flame spit out of the muzzle and I smelled powder and I waited for the pain. I thought I was dying and I wished I'd killed that Davidson guy first, on general principles. I was through anyhow, and I could have murdered him with no consequences to myself.

Then the wrong thing happened. The nasty little guy rolled his eyes and flopped. He was dead by the time he hit the floor.

I looked up. Rex was standing there behind him and a gun was lying on the floor.

I never liked Rex Davidson, but I've always had a sense of justice. He'd just saved my life. He'd shot this little guy just in time. Shot him so that the bullet aimed at me had gone wild.

It hurt, but I did it. I gulped, "Thanks, Rex. I never thought you had that much guts." And then I took the five hundred and handed it back to him. I had no right to that fee.

He accepted the money and looked happy. He always does, when he's on the receiving end. He pocketed the bills and remarked, "You know, I didn't have anything to do with it."

"What!" I yelled.

"Somebody came through the door and fired past me."

The druggist was standing up behind the soda counter, and I wheeled and snapped, "Who shot this little guy?"

"I don't know. A man rushed in—fired—and ran out."

I grabbed Rex. "Give me back that five hundred."

He grinned. "Oh no, Jimmy. You returned it of your own free will."

I smashed him in the jaw and he knocked over a show case. Then people began rushing in and the confusion started.

There was nothing more in it for me. All anybody knew was that the killer had worn a gray suit and had disappeared around the corner. The body was identified as that of Joe Rinconi, a gunman who'd do pretty much anything for anybody. But he was too dead to talk.

I went home and planned a quiet evening. There was an all-Beethoven concert on the radio and I relaxed with a

glass of fruit juice and a good book. I hardly looked at the book. Music puts me in a sort of trance and you could throw a rock through my window and I wouldn't even hear.

Well, that's an exaggeration maybe, but a man could break into my apartment and walk across the room without my knowing it. And that's exactly what happened.

He was wearing a gray suit and he looked pudgy. He had small brown eyes, but that was all I could see of his face. He had a mask over the rest of it.

I was sipping my fruit juice when I saw him. Him and the gun. I started and the fruit juice spilled and some of it fell on his trouser leg. I put the glass down.

"I just wanted to tell you," he said, and he picked his words and enunciated them carefully, "not to let anything happen to Rex Davidson."

That was a funny one. "You a friend of his?" I asked.

He didn't answer.

"If you want me to take care of him," I went on, "tell him to pay. You know—no pay, no work."

"You," he said, "are responsible for him. He's in danger, but if he dies, you die too."

"Tell him to pay," I repeated.

He slapped me in the mouth. Then he said, "Get up, please."

Polite, at a time like that. I couldn't help thinking he was the man who had rubbed out Rinconi.

He motioned me to the closet, pushed me in and locked the door. He left the key in and it took me about five minutes to get free.

I turned off the radio, sat down and thought for a while. Then I slipped a small can of fruit juice in my overcoat pocket and went over to Rex's. Luck was with me and he wasn't home. I had a key to his place and I let myself in. I spilled a little fruit juice on his

best gray suit and went out.

Back home, the Beethoven concert was over, but I turned on the victrola attachment and put on some records. Beethoven, of course. Then I called Jenks. It took me about fifteen minutes to locate him.

MAYBE I'd better tell you more about Jenks. He hates me because I write the truth about him. He has the brain and the body of a gorilla. He's the best thing in the world when you want a shield from a machine gun, and the worst thing in the world when you want a little intelligence.

I told him briefly what had happened. He said, "If this is one of your gags, I'll mash you to a pulp. I been wanting to do that for a long time, anyhow."

"A man comes into my apartment, holds me up and locks me in a closet and when I report it to the police I'm threatened. And asked if it's a gag. That's one for the commissioner."

The wire hummed while this ape tried to concentrate. He said, "What did the guy look like?"

"How do I know? He was masked and wore a gray suit. That's all I can tell you. I haven't the least idea who it was. For all I know, it might have been Rex." I kind of laughed at the idea, and added, "His build, too."

Jenks's mind—if you can call it a mind—is so primitive that you have to do his thinking for him. But he caught on. "This Davidson guy," he said. "He's been a nuisance ever since he's been in this town."

"Hasn't he, though," I said cheerfully.

"Listen, Fortune—maybe he pulled a fast one on you. Maybe he tried to scare you into protecting him! What do you think of that?"

"Not much." If I'd approved of the idea, Jenks would have dropped it.

"The way I figure it, about all you can do is watch the cleaning places for a pair of pants with a fruit stain."

"That's what *you'd* do!" roared Jenks. "But me—I think I'll go and have a look at Davidson's trousers."

"You're crazy," I said, and hung up.

I slept beautifully. I stuffed my telephone bell so that if Davidson tried to reach me, from jail for instance, he couldn't. I dreamt Jenks and Rex Davidson killed each other off and I woke up feeling like a million.

Jenks walked in on me while I was eating breakfast. I hadn't seen him in a while and he looked even bigger and dumber than I'd dreamt him. He said, "Why the hell don't you answer your telephone?"

"I always stuff it at night. What's up?"

"Where'd you spill this fruit juice?" he asked me.

I showed him the stain on the rug and he checked me pretty thoroughly. He asked me a lot of pointless questions and then inflated his chest and said, "It was Davidson all right, just like I guessed. He wanted to scare you into giving him protection."

"Did he admit it?"

"No, but he can't give an alibi for where he was last night."

Naturally not. He was probably with the Peters girl and he wouldn't drag her name into police records. He thinks he's Lancelot.

I lit a cigarette. "You've got a murder and a white slave case on your hands, Jenks, and Davidson thinks he's in danger. You don't seriously suspect him of being the man you're after, so why not release him?"

"Suppose they get him?" demanded Jenks.

I shrugged. "Well, suppose they do? What of it?"

Jenks let out a great burst of laughter. "Damned if I wouldn't like it!" he

roared, and slapped me so hard on the back that he nearly broke a couple of vertebrae.

I'd always thought it was nicer to have Jenks with me than against me, but not if he was that kind of a playmate. My back was sore for a week.

I went down to the jail with him and spoke to Rex from the other side of the cell. He looked haggard and kept whining at me.

"Get me out of here, Jimmy. You know damn well I didn't hold you up last night."

"I don't know why you asked me to come down here. You're no client of mine."

"I'm your friend, Jimmy. Get me out of here."

"Never mix friendship and business, Rex. You've always said so yourself."

Those baby-blue eyes of his went venomous. "If it's money you want—"

"Sure it is. Five hundred. Cash."

"They took my money. It's upstairs somewhere."

I handed him a piece of paper and my pen. "You could sign an IOU."

HE could and he did. I went up to Jenks's office and said, "Rex isn't the guy, Jenks. The one that held me up had brown eyes. And besides, I remember spilling some fruit juice on Rex's pants last week. Forgot to mention it last night."

Jenks's mouth tightened up like a taut cable. It must have taken all his power of will not to murder me right then and there.

After the spasm was over he said, "So you remember spilling some more fruit juice, do you? When?"

"Listen," I said. "There's no point in getting sore. I told you last night that you were crazy. But no. You wouldn't listen to me."

"When did you spill that fruit juice?" he repeated.

"Oh, one evening. I don't remember exactly when."

"Come on up to your place and show me the stain. You got a stain for last night; I want to see the one for the other time."

"It happened in the kitchenette, where there's a linoleum floor."

Jenks didn't even open his mouth. I had a queer feeling as I walked out.

If Jenks ever got it in that amoeba head of his that there was a way of adding two and two and getting five, he'd sit down and start adding. He might take liquid nourishment if it was handy, but eventually he'd starve to death. And he'd still be adding two and two as he died.

That's persistence. And now you know why I had a queer feeling.

Well, it was up to me. As sure as I lived, Jenks would get me for that fruit juice trick and my only chance was to crack the case and then make a deal with him. I'd been too smart. He might not be able to railroad me to prison, but he'd get me in a back room and cripple me for life.

I walked around for a while. I felt miserable and didn't know where to start. Jenks knew nothing about a white slave gang working the town and there was nothing in the modus operandi file. And if Jenks couldn't walk out and pick up the guy that wore wigs and slipped dope into young ladies' coffee, he was going to be hard to find.

The toughest thing in the world is to shadow a man without his realizing it, and as soon as I came out of my fog I noticed somebody was following me. I turned the next corner and waited. When the medium-sized guy in a gray suit came around the building, I stepped in front of him and blocked the way. He was on the pudgy side and he had brown eyes. One trouser leg had a stain. Fruit juice?

I said, "Hello." He looked surprised

and didn't answer. "I owe you one for last night," I went on, "but maybe I'll let it go. Suppose we sit down and talk."

He nodded, but he still didn't speak. We walked about a block and then he drew back. "Not here," he said. "Let's go somewhere else." I was sure of him now that I heard his voice. . .

"Seems as good a place as any," I said. It wasn't exactly the nicest part of town, but all the underworld dives were in the neighborhood.

"They'll kill me," he said weakly.

"Who?"

He just shook his head.

"It's nothing to me if somebody bumps you. According to the conversation we had last night, I'd be a lot safer with you out of the way. So step. Or maybe you want me to turn you over to the police."

A do-or-die look came into his eyes and his jaw stiffened. But he came along. The joint I picked was almost empty. I walked towards the rear and sat down in a booth. I took the end of the bench facing the door so that I could see whoever came in. He had no choice but to sit opposite me.

"Well?" I said. "Yesterday afternoon you killed a man. Last night you busted into my apartment, locked me up and threatened me. What's it all about and why your interest in this Davidson guy?"

He wet his lips. "I'll tell you," he said. "You'd be better off if you didn't know, but you want it. Here goes.

"My name's Maynard. I used to be a buyer in a shoe store and I was engaged to a girl. Her name doesn't matter. But one day she disappeared. The police couldn't find her and she hadn't been admitted to any of the hospitals and there was no trace of her. She was just gone."

A small man who looked like a jockey came in, noticed me and held a whis-

pered conversation with the bartender. Then he walked over to the phone.

MAYNARD couldn't see him, but even if Maynard had, I doubt whether anything would have registered. He was too intent on his story. He was nervous and had to suck in his breath between sentences.

"You can imagine how I felt. I was wild with grief and worry. I could hardly hold down my job. My department was slipping and I knew I'd get fired. I didn't even care. I was surprised that they let me take my next buying trip. I wish they hadn't. I wish they'd fired me and I'd committed suicide or something, because what I saw on that trip was something worse. So low and rotten. I swore a great oath—"

He stopped speaking for a few seconds. The jockey finished his phone call and went out. I could see his shadow just outside the door. He was waiting.

"I saw her in the city," Maynard went on. "It just happened. In a joint. I hardly recognized her at first. She was pale and drawn and her cheeks were sunken, even under the rouge. And her eyes had an expression that turned my blood cold.

"I took her out of the place and brought her to a hospital, but it was too late. Her whole constitution had been undermined. Drugs. She'd contracted the narcotic habit. And she had a cold that turned into pneumonia, and she died. But she told me her story first.

"She'd fainted one day on the street. She didn't know why. She'd been perfectly healthy and—"

"Had she just been to a restaurant?" I interrupted. "And had a cup of coffee?"

Maynard nodded slowly. "Yes, but how did you know?" Then he grunted. "Davidson told you. The old lady who

slipped a drug in her coffee and then took her away in a cab. It's the same trick. She was taken to a house—she didn't even know where—and they gave her drugs and broke her down until she was just a husk of herself. Then she was shipped away. She hardly knew what she was doing. She was drugged all the time, her mind cracking and her spirit broken. It was horrible—horrible!”

He stared past me, and I knew what he was seeing. A girl. A girl the way she'd been once, and again the way she'd been when she'd died.

“Well?” I said. The little jockey's shadow was still outside.

Maynard sighed and wet his lips. “The other day I saw a crowd on the street. I wandered over and got there just too late. Just as Davidson knocked the wig off. Just in time to see him escape.

“I followed Davidson home. I realized he could identify one of the gang and could testify to a specific act. I couldn't, you see. I knew the background, but I didn't know who they were and my story was all hearsay. I couldn't bring a charge. The district attorney—he told me that. But with Davidson—you see how important he is? That's why I've been following him, guarding his life, hoping to make contact with the gang. I followed him yesterday when this Rinconi tried to kill you in the booth. I managed to shoot him first, but I saw how desperate and cunning they were. That's why I came to see you last night. You can follow Davidson and protect him, but I can't. Because even though I don't know the gang, they know me. They tried to kill me, twice. I'm not safe in this district. That's why I didn't want to come here. You'll help, won't you?”

I said, “Sure. Just a minute.” Then I got up and went to the telephone.

I called Jenks and told him to come

down quick. I didn't dare take Maynard up to headquarters. I was afraid this jockey outside would go haywire and shoot. Rinconi had been desperate. I wanted to square myself with Jenks and avoid risks.

I watched that door like a starving mutt waiting for a bone. I had my hand on my “32.” Somehow, Maynard made me nervous. I don't get that way often, but everything about this case was going wrong.

And then Jenks marched in, with his derby hat set like a tin hat on the side of his head. There are times when I almost like Jenks. There's something solid and substantial and reliable about him. Like a blockhouse.

He marched in and I introduced him to Maynard. “This is the man that shot Rinconi.”

Jenks growled and yanked out his handcuffs, and Maynard spat at me. “You rotten doublecrossing heel!”

I snapped at Jenks, “Sit down, and put those things away. And listen.”

HE obeyed, hesitantly, and sat down next to Maynard. I talked fast and showed how Maynard and Davidson made a perfect case, and how all Jenks had to do was take charge of Maynard and wait for the gang to have another try at him.

“We stick together,” I said, “the three of us. You and I are the jaws of the trap and Maynard's the bait. The gang are bound to bite.”

They didn't like the idea, Maynard because he was the target, and Jenks because it violated rules. I had to do a lot of persuading, but when I'd finished my piece I leaned back and looked at Jenks and said, “Well?”

His mind works like a caterpillar's. I could have digested two beers while he thought it over. “Come on,” he said finally. “Let's go.”

I laughed at him. “It has to be a

little more subtle than parading around the block. Expect them to see Maynard and miss your derby and that ugly mug of yours? When they see you, they'll run."

Jenks grinned. "Yeah. Crooks are scared of me. They know me and they run." He rubbed the stubble on his chin. "What'll we do?"

"Was anyone hanging around outside when you came in?" I asked.

"Street was empty," said Jenks. "What do you want?"

"Use it," I answered. At the same time I shoved my "32" in his lap, under the table of course. My voice carried through the whole room as I stood up. "So long, Maynard. I don't know yet what it's all about, but you be down at headquarters tomorrow. At ten."

Maynard blinked and tried to stand up. Jenks shoved him back in his corner. I put a cigarette in my mouth and started for the door. Jenks's mind hadn't adjusted yet.

As I said before, I'd been facing the entrance, and Maynard and Jenks had their backs to it. Naturally, they hadn't seen the trio walk in and speak to the bartender. I didn't know who they were, but one of them was the jockey who had telephoned.

Maybe you're thinking I should have stayed at the table, told Jenks and Maynard and stuck by them. The sides were even, three to three, and we wouldn't have been surprised. But in the first place I was in sight the whole time and if I'd pulled a gun I'd have been the first casualty. If there were any other reasons, they didn't really count.

I studied the three as I headed for the door. A big fat-faced burly guy who could give even Jenks a workout, a tall toothy insolent guy, and the jockey.

I'd have preferred the jockey because he was little and I could have handled

him without trouble and then grabbed his gun, but he was too far away from me. I had to act natural.

I stopped next to Toothy and said, "Got a light?"

He gave the big guy a cagy look and said, "Sure." He lit the match himself. "Friend of yours back there?" he asked.

I took the light. "Some crank trying to sell a story to my paper. But hell—if he's got anything let him tell the dicks. I'll be there and hear it for nothing."

That was when Jenks had to stand up, of course. He should have had a big sign, Police, clamped onto that derby. Then old ladies and children would have known who he was; everybody else did.

Toothy saw. I jabbed for his jaw and caught his teeth. They ripped my knuckles like a buzz saw. He went for his gun but I hugged him so that he couldn't pull it. At the same time I banged out with my knee and the pair of us hit the floor and rolled.

I heard the war but I was more interested in my private battle. Shots thundered and glass crashed and somebody was cursing. Outside, the whole world was screaming. I kept Toothy's arms pinned and nothing else mattered.

He fought like a cat. He kicked and clawed and bit and squirmed, and I raised my head and butted. My shoulders were being torn out of their sockets and my stomach was taking punishment, but I clung. I could only use my skull and my feet; those buzz-saw teeth were raking me and I could hardly breathe. I tried to lift him up and smash his head open on a table leg. We kept rolling and scrambling, and then I got in the way of that table leg. It crashed dull and heavy on my head and a gun exploded in my ear. I felt my arms loosen and go weak, and I knew I was dead.

SURE. It was the second time in one case that I was sure I was killed. And the second time it was really the other guy who'd been bumped.

Jenks was standing over me and grinning. He had a bullet hole in his derby and his left arm hung limp, but he'd picked off Toothy just as Toothy had finally gotten hold of his gun. I disentangled myself. I felt weak and I retched.

Jenks laughed at me. "Sissy!" he bellowed. "You ought to build up a little muscle. Letting a sap like that get the best of you!"

I glared at Jenks and watched the blood come through his sleeve. "You lousy gorilla!" I squawked. "If you had a brain in your head, you'd have given me time to make my play. I'd have jumped that guy and gotten his gun and covered the other two from behind. But no. You don't know what it means when I shove a gun in your lap. You have to show that derby of yours and give everything away."

He handed me my "32." "Call that a gun? Hell—I wouldn't even use a toy like that. Afraid they'd all laugh."

Judging by the remains of Toothy and by the way the jockey and the burly guy were yowling while Maynard covered them, Jenks had used a twelve-inch siege gun. But it was his "45," of course. He's famous with it.

Faced with Maynard's and Rex's evidence, the gang confessed. There were just the three of them. Cameron, the toothy guy, would spot a girl and find out her background. Then if Raminbino, the big guy who was the head of the gang, decided she was okay and her disappearance wouldn't mean too much fuss, they'd either invite her on a party and drug her, or else the jockey would dress up as an old lady and pull the act that Rex had seen. For a few weeks

they'd feed the girl drugs and break her down. Then they'd ship her out of town to a ring that paid the gang cash. Rincomi wasn't even a member of the gang. He'd been hired to pick me off after Rex consulted me.

I had dinner with Rex that evening. He kidded me about the plaster on my face, but that wasn't what I minded. It was the attitude he took.

"It was really pretty simple for you," he said, "first calling in the police and then letting Maynard do all the work. And for that, you want to collect five hundred."

I knew what was coming. It always did. So I cut him off before he could make his speech about not liking to pay money to a friend.

"Rex," I said, "I have your IOU for five hundred and if necessary I'll sue on it. But I'll match you, double or nothing."

I tossed the quarter and he yelled heads. It fell on the floor and I leaned down and covered it with my hand. It was heads, but he didn't see me switch coins. All he saw was the tails.

He just sighed and reached into his pocket, but instead of one grand he handed me a slip of paper. It was a summons in an action for damages for false imprisonment and obtaining money under false pretenses.

I must have looked murderous, because this Davidson guy held up his hand to protect himself and said, "Don't, Jimmy! It was Jenks's idea. He found out that you sneaked into my place with some fruit juice and spilt it on my trousers. He said he could prove it and that I had a perfect case. But I'll settle for the thousand I owe you."

He swallowed and handed me the summons to tear up. Silently, I exchanged it for the IOU.

Can you beat that one?

THE END

THE CANDID CADAVERS

By EATON K. GOLDTHWAITE

Author of "One Corpse Too Many," etc.



Turkey Taylor heaved suddenly and the rat-faced guy landed with a deadening "clunk" against the radiator!

The butcher knife would be something for the bulls, and the dame who kicked in with the cadaver—it would be Turkey Taylor, private dick, though, who did the dirty work for the cops!

"I'M very busy right now. Tell him to wait," Turkey Taylor said to the dictograph. His right foot raised from his left, crossed over the pile of unopened bills and the toe of his painfully polished oxford hesitated as it engaged the switch. Cautiously he said, "What did he say his name was?"

"Minnick," the new girl's voice responded with prompt efficiency. "Mr Henry Minnick."

"Um," Turkey Taylor said, frowning. Minnick. He squinted and shuffled through his memory. Henry Minnick—The name meant nothing. Which, under the circumstances, was satisfactory.

"Make sure that he waits," Turkey admonished in careful undertone. "If he gets restless, give me a buzz."

"Yes, sir."

Turkey's foot closed the connection, came back to rest on the stack of envelopes. Scowling, he singled one out with his heel and pulled it towards him. The Audion Appliance Shop. That would be the notice of the overdue installment on the dictograph. His frown deepened as he scanned the walls, resting momentarily on a battered filing cabinet. Yesterday morning that filing cabinet had been new and sleek, sporting chromium fittings and a twenty-year guarantee. But yesterday afternoon a couple of pug-uglies from the Friendly Furniture Mart had marched in and carried it off. The duplicate resting there in sodden protest against being once again returned to service had cost a dollar and a half. But at least it was paid for.

Turkey pursed his lips, dug a thumb into his tight thatch, and with the fingers of his left hand began to count. Sixty-five, sixty-six, sixty-seven—There were sixty-seven business schools in the City. Deducting the three weeks he had been in business and the three schools that had supplied him with stenographic help on trial, he had sixty-four weeks to go before the problem of assistance would become acute. And there were thousands of office buildings, which practically assured him of thousands of months of tenancy. His only problem, then, was to eat and buy gas for the Chevy. Maybe a client would show up some time. Stranger things had happened. But not much stranger.

With sudden alacrity Turkey took his feet from the desk. He grasped a brace of letters, ripped open a pair of them. Selecting an appeal from the Friends of China he concentrated on it, flicked the dictograph switch and said briskly, "You may show the gentleman

in."

Turkey was becoming greatly interested in the plight of the Chinese when the door opened. Somebody came in and without looking up Turkey said, "Sit down. I'll be through in a minute."

But the somebody didn't sit down. He grunted a sarcastic "Humph!" and Turkey glanced up in surprise. And then he glared angrily and barked, "Since when has your name been Minnick, Samuels?"

Samuels' wizened face cracked in an unpleasant smile. His skinny lips rubbed together and a talon-like finger scratched his plentiful nose. Smirking he said, "Well, Mr. Taylor, since you are always out to Samuels, I thought maybe you would be in to Minnick. So I'm here about the rent again. And this time I don't mean maybe."

Turkey glared. "I told you you'd get your rent as soon as this case I'm working on has been cleaned up."

"What case?" Mr. Samuels remarked unpleasantly.

"This insurance case!" Turkey said brazenly. He thumbed through the letters, found one that was a long and involved explanation of the thirty-day grace clause before the Indemnity Accident Company would be forced to void his policy. He snatched it up, passed it rapidly before Samuels' hard, suspicious eyes. "You know how insurance companies are. It's as good as money in the bank. You'll be paid."

Samuels hesitated. His mental processes shifted the scenery of his eyes until doubtful hope replaced the suspicion. "You're sure you got a case with an insurance company?" he sniffed.

TURKEY gathered his letters. He jerked open the desk drawer, dropped them inside. He closed and locked the drawer, rose to his feet. A picture of injured dignity he said coldly, "I'll have to ask you to excuse me. I'm a

very busy man."

Samuels shuffled his feet. "Well—"

The dictograph buzzed. Turkey leaned over it. "Two gentlemen to see you. Mr. O'Toole and Mr. Bloom," the new secretary's voice announced crisply.

"Oh, from the insurance company," Turkey said loudly. "I'll be ready in a minute."

Samuels hesitated no longer. "Very well," he said. "I'll give you until Saturday. But by that time, no money and out you go."

Turkey followed him to and through the door. He hustled him past the secretary and the two mountains of flesh occupying the waiting room chairs. "You'll get results, Mr. Samuels—Minnick," Turkey promised in a voice calculated to down any leave-taking remarks. "The Taylor Agency never fails. Good day, sir. Good day—"

He closed the door and turned to inspect the prospective clients. There was a lot of them to inspect. The nearest was as big as a horse, with hands and feet to match. His hair was red, his face was red, and the stomach that strained against his blue serge coat showed that he ate well and regularly. Suspicion dawned in Turkey Taylor's mind and his eyes narrowed as he looked at the fellow's shoes. Size thirteen they must have been, and archless as a flounder's back.

The other fellow was bigger, if that was possible. His hair was black and woolly as a Persian lamb's. His face was lobster-hued and guileless. His hands were as big and bumpy as taxi fenders and they held his hat as if it might be a fragile vase. And his shoes—

"If it's about my car that's been parked on the street all night," Turkey Taylor grunted, "you shams can forget it. I'm a taxpayer and I got a right."

The red-head swung his hand in a haymaker of protest. "Naw, Mister Taylor!" he exclaimed in a brogue as

thick as his arm. "Naw! You got us wrong. We're clients. Aren't we, Sid?"

The woolly head nodded vigorously. And then the black eyes narrowed cautiously. "Maybe. Who knows?" he parried and spread his hands.

Turkey stared. He gasped, "You mean you bulls want me to take a case?"

The fellow named Sid cringed and his eyes shuttled swiftly to the girl. "Please, Mister— Not so loud about it. Not so loud— We got to live yet, don't we O'Toole?"

O'Toole said grimly, "You betcha. An' that's why we're here. If that's another office you got in there—" His voice trailed significantly and his eye closed in an expansive wink.

Turkey Taylor stood aside, watching with defensive caution as the two mountains upheaved and rolled with ponderous tread toward his sanctum. A couple of shams for clients! A pair of flat-foot harness bulls; a duet of the boys in blue whose greatest delight was in shoving private cops around, coming to one with a case! Turkey shook his head, swallowed and pinched himself. "Ouch!" he muttered.

"What was that, Mr. Taylor?" the blonde typewriter chauffeur asked primly, moving so that an expanse of silk-clad excitement showed briefly.

Turkey grinned suddenly. His hand moved out and patted her head. "Sweet-heart," he said rashly, "I think maybe you're going to be all right!"

Fiery red stained her face. "I hope so!" she gasped.

Turkey was chuckling as he closed the door and faced his clients.

OFFICER Kelly O'Toole had the floor, and aided and urged by grunts and gesticulations from Officer Sid Bloom, was doing the talking. "So I pull the prowler over to his car, and I suspected right away somethin' was

wrong—”

“You’re a liar,” Bloom grunted. “Get on with the story.”

O’Toole looked hurt. “It was a phaeton and there was two fellas in it. Now, in March for a phaeton to be standin’ on the street all night with two fellas in it don’t make sense. ‘They’re probably drunk,’ said Mrs.—Mrs.—”

“Hagethorne,” Bloom supplied.

“Mrs. Hagethorne was the one who made the call. So I pulled th’ prowler over, climbed out and gave ’em the eye. The fella behind the wheel was a thin chap. There was tears frozen to his cheeks and his eyes looked like onions boiled in beet juice—”

“You slay me,” Bloom muttered.

Turkey Taylor ground a cigarette into the ash tray. “Do you want to tell this yarn?” he growled.

Bloom shrugged, and triumphantly O’Toole continued. “His nose looked like you could break it off and put it in a highball. I hollered at him and I got no answer. I hollered at the other guy, and I got no answer.” O’Toole paused for dramatic effect.

Turkey Taylor said, “You can skip that. I read the papers. The guy driving was drunk. The other guy was stiff as a plank. Had been dead for twelve hours. Choked. So?”

“So we took ’em in,” O’Toole said with a sidewise glance at his partner. “We took ’em to Sargint Tomasello of the Detective Department. Sid, it’s your turn.”

Bloom responded promptly. He commandeered the floor, and with words and gestures: “Ya mean ta say ya dunno what happened? Tomasello says. No sir, the guy says. Lemme get this straight, Tomasello says lookin’ at himself in a mirror and smoothin’ down his hair. You was drinkin’ gin in Sam Leach’s saloon an’ a fella named Bill that ya don’t know only by sight come over an’ sat down. An’ this Bill brought

a twist named Margaret. An’ you hadda lotta drinks together an’ then th’ girl saw another girl wit’ another fella an’ she rung ’em in on th’ party. An’ then the new girl decides she wants to blow, so she an’ th’ new fella an’ you all go off in your car. Is that th’ story? The guy says Yessir. An’ Tomasello says you don’t know nothin’ until you woke up this mornin’ half froze an’ found th’ guy dead an’ everybody else had scrambled. Is that th’ story? And the guy says Yessir.” Whereupon Officer Bloom paused for breath.

Turkey Taylor said, “So what am I supposed to do?”

O’Toole swallowed audibly. “Maybe you ought to hear the rest of it. Tell ’im Sid.”

Bloom said, “So the guy, whose name is Jack Eldredge, is out of work and out of luck. This guy Bill was gonna give ’im a job, and this is what happens instead. Maybe we got somethin’, maybe we don’t. But less’n two weeks ago O’Toole and me get a call to go to a house. There’s a dame in bed with a guy that’s got a butcher knife stuck in his ribs. ‘I didn’t do it,’ she hollers. All she can remember is drinkin’ and wakin’ up with a corpse on her hands.”

O’Toole leaned forward significantly. “She started in Leach’s saloon, same as the poor lad Eldredge,” he supplied.

Turkey Taylor yawned. Again he asked, “So what? You shams have a dick department. What’s it to me if a couple people kill a couple people and can’t remember? What’s it to me?”

O’Toole began to perspire around the edges. “Look, Mister Taylor. We felt sorry for the poor lad and we was tryin’ to help him in our own way. We went into Leach’s saloon and started to ask questions. Leach says he don’t know nothin’ about what’s happened, but he’s got a evening paper under his apron with the whole story in it. So we start to put th’ heat on and he clams, and

then who comes in but Tomasello."

"So," Sid Bloom added with great sadness, "Tomasello goes to the Commissioner and gets us put back on the lobster shift. Now it ain't no weather to be drivin' a perambulator at three o'clock in the mornin'. So we gotta have help."

Turkey Taylor hid a grin behind a frown. "In other words, you two shams want me to take up where you left off so's you can enjoy daylight again. Is that it?"

"Yes sir!"

Turkey Taylor said, "How much are you willing to pay?"

Bloom and O'Toole exchanged quick glances. Bloom said, "Well, now. I guess you know since the depression—"

O'Toole said, "We been reduced an' reduced. We—"

Bloom said, "We wanta do tha right thing. We're willin' to cooperate with you on your cases. We're willin' ta give ya somethin'—"

O'Toole said, "We thought you might like a couple tickets to the Policemen's Ball. They're gonna have a movie queen—"

Turkey Taylor yelled, "What?"

Sid Bloom said, "It'll be a very elegant affair."

Turkey Taylor slammed the desk until the ash tray jumped. "You bulls have the nerve to offer me *tickets* to solve a case at the expense of getting in wrong with the Commissioner? Are you daffy?"

Bloom ducked his head. "Well, it's a good case. You solve it an' you'll make a couple insurance companies happy."

Turkey Taylor's rage dwindled. "Insurance companies?"

"Yeah. Th' first guy, the butcher knife victim, had twenty grand on 'im. Th' second, the one that was choked, had thirty on him. And the widows got paid. I seen the checks."

"Double indemnity?" Turkey asked

in a breathless voice.

O'Toole swallowed like a suction pump. "Yeah. An' th' two women was a pair of th' worst twists I ever seen. There's somethin' in it, Mister Taylor. You ought to talk to th' poor lad. An' we'll be in a position t' cooperate. An' besides, maybe you got somebody'd like ta go th' Policemen's Ball. It'll be very elegant—"

BAILEY, O'Toole had said, was the name of the man murdered with a butcher knife. The Bailey house was the second from Parkview; it was dark and its shades were drawn as Turkey Taylor mounted the steps. His feet clattered with a hollow sound on the porch and he balanced his hat in his hand and pushed at the doorbell. No ring sounded from within. He knocked diffidently, changed it to indecent hammering, and in a few moments gave up. He came down from the porch, skirted scraggly evergreens and went around to the back. His torch winked briefly at drawn shades.

Turkey whistled noiselessly and pulled from his pocket a curious key. A bit of metal with many flanges; many notches and grooves. He did something with the key and presently was standing in a room that had once been a kitchen.

But it was not a kitchen now. It was empty; bare and dust-covered. Methodically he progressed, winking his torch through all the rooms; into corners, closets, cupboards. From cellar to garret he probed, and the sole reward of his efforts was a woman's old-fashioned leghorn hat. Whimsically he picked it up.

In the street again he turned and climbed another porch. Again the skimmer rested on his arm, this time augmented by the leghorn. Again he pushed a bell. A woman came almost at once. She was pale and thin, washed-out

looking, and her eyes held an unfriendly glint.

"We don't want any," she snarled and tried to close the door.

Turkey's Number Ten stopped her. "I'm looking for my friend Mister Bailey that lives next door. Has he gone away?"

"Nobody's been in that house for better'n year. Get your foot out of my door!"

"Sorry, lady. I'm from the police department. There's been a car around here, acting strange. I'm looking for information."

The woman's glance wavered. "I didn't see it. I mind my own business. And my husband didn't see it either. Now, go along with you!"

"Is your husband home?"

"No he isn't. He's working. He works nights."

"And where does he work?"

"At Leach's Restaurant, downtown. Now, will you stop chilling off my house?"

Turkey grinned. "Just one more question. What's your name?"

She glared. "What else would it be but the same as my husband's? Leach. Mrs. Samuel Leach. And if you don't get your foot out of the door I'll give you my heel!"

Turkey withdrew. He climbed down from the porch. He had gone a dozen steps toward the corner when something hard jammed into his ribs and a gruff voice said, "All right, now. Just take it easy!"

THERE were two men at least. Turkey's hands shot skyward, holding up the impossible leghorn hat. Light from the corner streetlamp fell on it and one of the men gasped. "Sid! That hat—"

"This is one of 'em, all right! Keep your hands up—"

Turkey Taylor brought his hands

down, swore, said, "I always thought harness bulls were dumb. Now I know it. What the hell are you trying to do?"

O'Toole and Bloom, like a pair of overstuffed bears, looked at each other, looked at Turkey Taylor. "We got a call," Bloom said. O'Toole supplied, "Somebody breakin' into a house on this street. Th' call came from Mrs.— Mrs.—"

"Hagethorne," Bloom said. "Gee, Mister Taylor. We're sorry. We gotta do our job. Where'd you get th' hat?"

"In that house. Why?"

"Because that's th' hat Mrs. Bailey wore when she come to claim her dead husband. I oughta know. It was stickin' in my face everytime I had to quiet her down."

Turkey Taylor grunted, "Huh! Well, she sure doesn't live there now. This Mrs. Hagethorne that makes so many complaints— Where does she live?"

O'Toole pointed with his thumb. "In th' next block. She's a nice old lady wit' white hair. Lives by herself. She's a— she's a—"

"Insomniac," Bloom said. "She can't sleep. So you're the one busted into this house, huh? Well. We gotta make a report. What'll we do about it, O'Toole?"

Turkey Taylor told them what they could do about it and started for Mrs. Hagethorne's.

THE little cottage was vine-covered and rambler rose bushes lining its path were carefully wrapped in sacking. Boards and burlap formed protective coverings around other shrubbery, giving an eerie cast to the moonlit lawn. A cheerful light glowed in the window and Turkey Taylor blew on his hands as he waited.

The door opened wide and light gleamed through an aura of crowning white hair. The woman was short and surprisingly broad without being fat.

A velvet choker was about her neck; her faded blue eyes were enormously magnified behind thick-lensed spectacles.

"Well, young man?" she said in a husky age-cracked voice.

Turkey Taylor pulled his coat back until his badge gleamed. "I'm Clancy, ma'am, from th' Department," he said in imitation of Kelly O'Toole's brogue. "You called about a breakin' an' entry job."

The woman hesitated. "Yes— I called. But it wasn't *my* house I meant. It was the house in back of me— I saw lights in it, not a half hour ago—"

Turkey pushed his way in. Her arms, he noticed, were surprisingly heavy. She stood undecidedly a moment, finally motioned for him to sit down.

The room was cozy. Neatly furnished, with cretonne curtains at the windows. A bird cage, covered for the night, hung near a window. There were books, a lot of them. A cylindrical oil stove cast a spotted pattern on the ceiling. A tawny cat, curled in a deep chair, jumped down and rubbed against Turkey's legs.

The woman smiled. "Trixie likes you, so you must be all right— Perhaps you think me a silly woman, but ever since I saw that car with the two men in it, parked all night on the next street, I've been frightened."

Turkey nodded sympathetically. "That was a week ago, wasn't it? When did you first notice the car?"

She sat forward eagerly, brought her magnified eyes to an intense stare. "About midnight. I hadn't been able to sleep— I was airing Trixie when I heard a car stop in the next street. I heard loud talking as if someone was angry. I walked through between the houses, and saw a girl, a young girl about twenty or twenty-five years old, walking down River Road. I saw a

man standing near the car, but I couldn't see if anyone was in it. I came back and let Trixie into the house and went to bed. Somewhere around four I got up to look at the furnace. I glanced out the window and could see, quite plainly, that the car was still there. And when I went out for milk, at eight, the car was still there. So I phoned the police."

"At eight o'clock," Turkey said. "Could you make out who was in the car?"

"Yes. Two men. They seemed asleep. Or frozen."

"And the man you saw first, the one standing near the car. Would you know him again?"

Surprise was in her voice as she answered, "Why, yes! He was Mr. Leach, one of my neighbors."

Turkey's eyes gleamed. He stood up. "Thanks very much, Mrs. Hagethorne. Have you told this to anyone else?"

She pursed her lips. "There was a man here. His name was Tomasello I think. Yes, I told him."

Turkey grinned. "There's nothing to worry about, ma'am. We'll take care of everything."

She followed him to the door, and as he went out he was vaguely annoyed, faintly irritated by something he couldn't place. Maybe it was because he thought that old ladies shouldn't be so spry, shouldn't be so apparently relieved to see him go.

SAM LEACH was bowlegged, hairy everywhere except on the top of his head, and otherwise generally simian except that he had a nose that could have peeled potatoes. "Bill?" he growled, dropping the corner of his mouth to release a shot at the cuspidor. "Bill who?"

Turkey Taylor fiddled with apparent nervousness with the worn lapel of his third-best suit. "Bill," he said anxious-

ly. "You know— He was goin' to give me a job. And, brother, I need it bad."

Sam Leach shook his head. "You gotta tell me more about him than that. It don't mean nothin' t' me. So if you wanta buy a drink, that's what I'm in business for. If you just wanta get warm, try the bus station down the street." And Mr. Leach moved down the bar to take care of a customer.

Turkey stood with one foot on the bar rail, his body turned indecisively. Inwardly he was baffled and angry. Baffled because Bill was the name Jack Eldredge, the kid in jail on a murder charge, had said he had used in contacting the fellow who had promised him a job. And Turkey was angry because the insurance company which had issued the policies on both of the murdered men had tossed him out. Laughed at him, told him to go pound sand. They had detectives, they said.

So Turkey Taylor's possible cash income had vanished in thin air. He was still working for nothing more than a pair of screwball cops named O'Toole and Bloom; the fee was a couple of Policemen's ball tickets—

"You waitin' for Bill?"

Turkey turned. The fellow was skinny and rat-faced and he talked out of the corner of his mouth. His shoulders twitched as he leaned against the bar, and from the dilation of his pupils Turkey knew him for what he was.

"Yes."

"Well, he'll be in after a while. Better not wait, though. Come back in a hour or so," the rat-faced guy said.

"Thanks," Turkey said gratefully.

In an hour, the fellow had said. Turkey looked away from Sam Leach's hard glance, picked up his foam-lined glass and nursed another drop from it. Well, the guy had better hurry. It was an hour and a half already—

A fellow was coming in. Short and broad, swaggering, piloting a mincing

blonde in a smart mink jacket.

"Hiya, bud," the fellow said as he got a chair under the blonde. "You the one Charley was tellin' me about?"

"I guess so," Turkey said. "If you're Bill, I am."

The fellow nodded, held up his hand and signalled Sam Leach. "Bring the kid another beer, and bring Honey and me Scotch," he ordered. Then to Turkey he said, "Who told you to see me?"

"A fella I met in a pool room," Turkey said. "I don't know his name."

"Was he short and kind of fat?" Bill asked. "Shorter than me?"

Turkey shook his head. "Nope. He was skinny."

The drinks arrived, and Bill paid for them out of a roll the size of Fort Knox. When Leach had gone he said, "Down the hatch." He drank, wiped his lips and said, "You're a — — liar. Nobody told you to see me. And I don't give no jobs to no bums. Drink your beer and get the hell out."

The blonde looked disinterestedly at Turkey Taylor, yawned, and covered her mouth with nail-polished fingers. Turkey swallowed and said, "Honest to God, mister, I need a job. Any kind. I don't care what it is."

Bill bored him with adamant eyes. "You're a liar. You don't need no job. Get the hell out or I'll throw you out."

Turkey shrugged, pushed the beer glass aside and stood up. "Okay, if that's the way you feel about it."

He was around the table and on his way to the door when Bill called him back. "Sit down," Bill invited. "Don't be in such a hurry. I just wanted to see if you could take it. Hey, Sam! Bring that Scotch bottle and three glasses— So you want a job, huh. All right. Can you drive a car?"

Turkey Taylor nodded.

"Well, listen." Bill leaned nearer, beckoned him to come closer for confidence. While Bill was whispering some-

thing about how would he like to make a grand, Turkey saw from the corner of his eye that the blonde had passed her handbag over his glass. Behind his dull, listening face he thought rapidly.

THE firm of O'Toole and Bloom overflowed the prowler, and O'Toole glared at the clock on the Elks Club as he passed. "Four o'clock," he announced bitterly. "And when d'ya suppose that detective we hired is gonna get us outa this?"

Bloom glared also, at the clock and at the darkness which was neither night nor day. "Ow, O'Toole," he groaned. His heart was too full to answer as the prowler slowed near the parking area by Joe's Elite Diner. The windows were steam filled and tantalizing odors drifted out. "O'Toole," he started to say—

"*Calling Car Seventy Eight! Calling Car Seventy Eight!*" the radio rasped.

"And what is the Sargint's sweet voice saying?" O'Toole grunted.

"*Go to Columbia Boulevard and Cedarcrest Avenue to investigate a parked car. That is all!*"

"Another parked car!" Bloom snorted. "Where's all the high-paid help with their motorcycles, I'd like ta know?"

Officer O'Toole jumped in excitement. "Ow! It was a parked car that got us into this mess. Maybe one'll get us out. Columbia and Cedarcrest is only two blocks from River Road and Parkview!"

Bloom's mouth snapped shut. The clutch re-engaged with the effete smoothness of a coupling freight and the prowler jackrabbitted into traffic. O'Toole's complaints about the draft were lost in an awesome medley of engine noises as Seventy-Eight parted the air like an onrushing comet.

At Cedarcrest Avenue, Columbia Boulevard dipped low to the river flat-

lands. It was a desolate area of intense cold and soupy fogs. As they passed the bridge O'Toole noticed that the Parkview corner light was out, and as they approached Cedarcrest he noticed that there too the streetlamp cast no glow. "F u n n y," he grunted. Sid Bloom's elbow nudged him. Off the side of the road, near a row of evergreens, was a roadster. Its top was down and a form hunched over its wheel.

"Hah!" snorted Bloom as he jammed the prowler to a stop. He poured out and lumbered to the roadster. "Hey, you!" he yelled. His broad foot held down the runningboard on the driver's side, and Kelly O'Toole's considerable paw embraced the opposite door. And then Kelly O'Toole gasped. "Sid! My God, it's—"

A new voice, menacing and sinister, snarled from the evergreen thicket. "Reach, coppers! Go for your heaters and we'll blast you!"

Bloom's broad back was square to the thicket, and although O'Toole might have dropped down with the roadster as a shield, Sid would have stopped lead. O'Toole hesitated, glaring into the darkness, and Sid Bloom answered the problem for him. The big fellow flopped sideways and away and his gun roared stabs of flaming defiance in the direction of the voice.

Kelly O'Toole lined up behind the body and began to throw lead over the engine hood. Coolly he pumped, watching the thicket for tell-tale signs. A bullet smashed the radiator cap to bits and he was levelling when a weight crashed against his skull and the whole world seemed to collapse.

Kelly O'Toole stared dully around him. He was on a floor, a wooden floor that was hard and cold. Even with the floor, a long ways off, a slot of light showed the bottom of a door. "Sid," he muttered. "Sid—"

Footsteps telegraphed against the floorboards. The slot of light expanded to outline a short, swaggering fellow standing on long pointed shoes with cuban heels. "So you're comin' around," he snarled. "Okay, boys, drag him in here."

Kelly O'Toole felt himself lifted from the floor and carried into a room that was bare of furniture save for a table and two chairs. In one of the chairs Sid Bloom slumped and his curly dark head lolled on the table. In the other chair Turkey Taylor was limply stretched, his head tilted back, and loud unbeautiful snores issued from his nose.

The door to a room opposite opened and in came a woman. An elderly woman with snowy white hair and a black velvet choker around her neck. Thick-lensed glasses magnified her eyes and she grinned humorously at the tableau of Turkey Taylor, Sid Bloom and Kelly O'Toole.

"Mrs. Hagethorne!" Kelly O'Toole gasped, remembering her name for once.

SHE smiled coldly. "Coming around all right, eh wise guy?" she said in a husky, cracking voice. "Good! I want you to know what's happening to you. Okay, Bill. Douse 'im!"

From behind Kelly O'Toole came movement. A cold, wet shower struck his shoulders and seeped down his tunic. The pungent odor of gasoline assailed his nostrils.

The old woman cackled and her mouth snapped like a rat trap. "So you boys thought you'd play detectives, huh? So you even hired a private dick? So you suspected how we picked up bums, filled 'em with shot hootch and then stuck 'em with stiffs? Well, listen good. Maybe it'll make you feel cold after awhile, when you're burnin' up!"

Kelly O'Toole groaned, "Sid—"

The old woman motioned to Bill. "See if the car's here yet. We'll let the

private dick have the honor of waking up with the curly headed sham after we've shot him. The redhead gets handcuffed to a radiator." She moved nearer, walking between Turkey Taylor and Kelly O'Toole as Bill went out. Her magnified eyes crinkled with smiles as they inspected O'Toole. She said, "This is one job we don't get paid for. But a guy has to do something for his art once in awhile. The house ain't even insured, and none o' the gals will show up to claim your remains. But it's gonna be fun to watch."

Kelly O'Toole gasped, "Lady, you're crazy! You—"

With startling suddenness the woman seemed to go straight up in the air. Her feet were off the floor. And then she came down with abruptness. The white crown that was her hair came loose, rolled away, showed a close-cropped dark head. The thick glasses jarred loose—

Turkey Taylor had come to life. He was slashing viciously, holding to the arm of a skinny rat-faced guy who was drawing a gun. The table went over, smashing to bits, and with it Sid Bloom dropped laxly.

Kelly O'Toole seized his wits long enough to explode an uppercut in the face of the man nearest him. The welter of arms and legs around the table began to define into component parts. Kelly O'Toole stopped the mad scramble of "Mrs." Hagethorne for his glasses by planting his great foot on them, stamping them to sawdust.

Turkey Taylor yelled, "O'Toole! Behind you—"

Kelly O'Toole turned, jumped feet foremost, kicking a tommy gun out of the hands of a squat bald-head who had come in from the other room.

Turkey Taylor heaved suddenly and the rat-faced guy sailed through the air, landing with a deadening "clunk" against the steam radiator. Turkey was

up, then, reaching beyond his balance for the man in woman's clothes. But the stiff alpaca slipped through his fingers. Screaming a curse, "Mrs." Hagethorne bolted for the door, ran into the jamb, fumbled and then got out.

"Help me with your partner!" Turkey yelled. "He's been hit. We got to —" He pulled back from the door as a bullet passed through, smacking into the plaster of the ceiling. And then from the door drifted the acrid smell of smoke.

O'Toole let drive with one of his feet and a window, sash, glass and frame, disappeared into the night. Growling he lifted the skinny guy by the seat of his pants and the scruff of his neck and sent him after it. He moved aside as Turkey Taylor tossed the squatty bald-head, screaming, on the same route. And then O'Toole moved, bent down tenderly, lifted Sid Bloom to his feet.

Flames were starting along the floor and the smoke was unbearable as Kelly O'Toole locked his arms around Sid Bloom, stood with him by the window, and toppled into the night.

Turkey Taylor alone was left in the room. Winding his coat around his head he started for the burning stairs.

"Which one of you is O'Toole?" the Commissioner asked, looking perplexedly at the three mounds of bandaged bulk in the hospital beds.

"I am, sir," one of the mounds admitted.

"Good. I am pleased to report that your bravery and devotion to duty has broken up one of the most vicious murder-for-insurance rings this city has ever known. In view of your service I am recommending promotion."

The mound didn't seem very enthusiastic. "How about Bloom?" it said.

"Bloom is slated for the desk, with stripes."

Mound Number Two heaved a sigh. "Ow, O'Toole! No more lobster shift.

No more drafts—"

"How about me?" Mound Number Three yelled petulantly.

A smart, chic nurse tap-tapped forward. "Mister Taylor? There's a gentleman here to see you. From the insurance company."

TURKEY TAYLOR snorted as much as his bandages would allow. "At last! Well, show the guy in. My Goodness!"

The "guy" came in. He was breezy and well-fed and he exuded prosperity and personality. In his hands he carried a sheet of paper and he moved briskly, selecting the most likely of the three mounds. "Mr. Taylor?" he warbled. "I'm from the Indemnity Accident Insurance Corporation. You—"

"Over here," Turkey motioned with his toes. "So you guys have your own dicks. Better than me, huh. Well it's about time you came to your senses and hired an agency that—"

"Mr. Taylor," the gentleman said in perplexity, "I don't understand you. I said I was from the Insurance Company —"

"I heard you," Turkey muttered. "My services are gonna come high."

"I'm afraid I don't know what you are talking about. My Company has sent me here. Even though your policy has passed the premium date, the grace clause still keeps it in force. The Indemnity Accident Insurance Corporation settles all its claims promptly without fear or favor. Now if you'll just sign this release—"

"Sign?" Turkey bellowed. "Release? What with me fried to a crisp? Brother, you see my attorney. His name's Samuels and he stays in the Industrial Building—and here. Take him these damned tickets to the Policemen's Ball, Tell him to—"

"Aw, now," Kelly O'Toole, Sid Bloom and the Commissioner said in chorus.

THE CORPSE THAT CAME

*Here was this eighty grand in his bankbook,
grand missing from*



Mark's gun bucked savagely in his hand, squeezing bullets at the tires of the coupe.

THE elevator felt like a trap, stifling him.

Mark Gallant leaned against the bronze-painted wall and forced him-

self to breathe slowly and regularly while the cage, with a tantalizing lack of concern for speed, descended to the lobby.

CRACK CRIME MYSTERY OF A DOWN-ON-HIS-LUCK DICK WHO COULD

TO STAY

By EDWARD RONNS

Author of
"Show Me the Way to the Morgue," etc.

*and this corpse on his doorstep, and this eighty
the cadaver's cash-box!*



Sally Cord's white, frightened face was turned towards him for an instant—and was gone!

A sharp frown was incised between his black brows as he studied the maroon flooring. In one corner, near the operating buttons, were bloodstains like

the ones in the hall outside his apartment—little exclamation points of horror. Mark shivered. His square, firm face was pale under its tan. Tightening

NOT EVEN BORROW TROUBLE WITHOUT SIGNING FOR IT IN BLOOD!

his lips, he stepped out of the elevator as it reached the lobby floor.

A patrolman was standing uncertainly just inside the chrome-bound doors of the Hoxton Arms. The cop's face was red and bitter. He was talking to a frightened desk clerk and pointing a stubby finger at three or four more of the tell-tale red spots on the lobby carpet. Their voices reached across the softly lighted expanse of furniture and potted ferns and stopped Mark in his tracks.

He paused only a moment, then stepped back into the elevator and savagely jabbed the fourth-floor button. Through the diamond-shaped window Mark caught a glimpse of the cop's head turning toward him; then it was gone as the cage whined slowly upward.

Mark took a handkerchief and dried his fingers. His hands were trembling a little. He didn't like the way things were happening.

The corridor was bathed in soft amber light from an electric candelabrum set back in a niche. Mark's nerves tensed as he slid his apartment key into the lock. No sound came from the elevator shaft or the lobby below. He opened the door and slid quickly inside, flicked on the light and stared grimly at the dead man on the floor.

"You always were a trouble-maker, Nickie," he muttered.

Nickie Kavalla was a short, plump man with a round moon face and a little rose-bud mouth under a black moustache. His striped pink shirts and and checked suits were legends among the gambling circuits in town. He had been shot three times in the chest. He was quite dead. He had died ringing the bell to Mark Gallant's apartment just five minutes before.

Mark hadn't touched him then, except to move his tiny feet aside to close the door. Now, with his head cocked for sounds of police pursuit from

the corridor, his hands made a swift examination of the dead man's body. Nickie Kavalla still had his money—fresh hundred-dollar bills in a crisp wad. He still had his gun, a snubby .32. It hadn't been fired. Whoever had shot Nickie Kavalla had been a friend. Or so Nickie had thought.

There was a dark smudge on the back of the dead man's plump right hand. It didn't come off when he touched it. It looked like printer's ink.

A siren wailed in the street below. Mark straightened with a frown and stepped quickly to the window, moved the blinds a little and looked down. Two radio cars had pulled up in front of the Hoxton marquee. A familiar figure in gray hat and suit was giving rapid orders. Two of the cops trotted up the areaway to cover the back of the building.

MARK swore softly and studied his apartment beneath lowering brows.

It wasn't the kind of place you'd expect to find a lieutenant of Homicide occupying. The Hoxton Arms was far too expensive for any ordinary cop. But then, no cop who has eighty grand in the bank is ordinary.

Thinking of the money he had inherited ten days ago, Mark cursed with tired exasperation. He didn't want it. He wished he had never heard of his uncle on the West Coast. The money had given him nothing but trouble from the very beginning.

Two days before the letter came informing him of his inheritance, Mark had led his special gambling squad in a raid on Nickie Kavalla's sumptuous establishment, wiping it off the crime map. A lot of big fish had been caught in the net, but the real trouble didn't start until Nickie Kavalla came into headquarters the next day and demanded an accounting of the money

he'd had in the safe. Eighty grand. Kavalla had thought the cops had confiscated it. Mark had never seen it. And two days after that, Mark had inherited his eighty thousand dollars.

It looked funny, but he had the proof. He showed the lawyer's letters to Captain Ryce. But nothing he did could quiet the ugly rumors that started around. It was too much of a coincidence. Nothing was said to Mark's face, but he knew what was being whispered behind his back.

Nickie Kavalla had been especially ugly about the missing eighty grand. A hijacking under the very noses of Mark's raiding squad was unthinkable. Kavalla's protests had a personal tone, too. There was Sally Cord, Nickie's adopted daughter. Mark had been seeing a lot of her. Sally was peculiarly loyal to the plump little gambler who had taken her under his wing as a child, protecting her and giving her an education and security. She wouldn't hear anything against Kavalla. It had been a sore spot between them.

Mark breathed heavily, staring at Kavalla's body. Now there was this. There was still a faint bruise on the dead man's chin, a memento of Mark's knuckles the night before. Kavalla had made a scene on finding Mark and Sally together. There had been ugly words and an ugly fight. Everybody knew about it. Now, following the trail of Nick Kavalla's bloodstains, the cops were at Mark Gallant's door. Cops with suspicious eyes and unspoken accusations on hard lips. Even Captain Ryce, Mark's sidekick, wasn't able to conceal the strangeness in his eyes when he looked at him.

"I won't get a break," Mark muttered. He felt cold inside, looking at the grotesque little dead man on the floor. "Why in hell did you come to my door and die?"

Decision was suddenly crystal-clear in his mind. He had to stay free to fight the cloud of suspicion that surrounded him. He had to settle this case once and for all, to vindicate himself. And to do that, he had to stay clear of the cops.

HE was breathing a little faster as he got his gun from the table drawer and slid it into his pocket. He slapped a hat on his head and gave the dead man a hard grin, then softly eased out of the apartment and started for the elevator.

The indicator was swinging from 3 to 4. Mark ducked back for the stairs. Voices and the scuffing of feet drifted up to him. He sucked in a quick breath, feeling trapped. His gray eyes narrowed and settled on the steps leading to the roof terrace.

He was through the door and out into the night before the cops reached the fourth floor. The air was warm, like a moist slap in the face. He moved soundlessly over the red tiles, among metal chairs and folded umbrellas. There was no fire-escape. Staring down into the areaway, he made out a cop pacing restlessly back and forth. The next house was seven feet away across a five story drop and one floor down, the end house of a row of stately brownstone mansions. This first one belonged to the notorious Letitia Leames, a spinster famous for her pre-war clothes, riches and manners.

Next to this was the raided gambling house of Nickie Kavalla. Mark hadn't chosen the Hoxton Arms as his new address for nothing.

He cast about for some means of escape. If there was a way to get across the alley to the next roof—

His glance settled on a tangle of aerial wires nearby, and he strode swiftly toward them. They were loose and easily detached. He had to work

fast. By this time Captain Ryce would have found Kavalla's body in his apartment and the patrolman would mention having seeing Mark in the lobby. Ryce would realize that Mark was still somewhere in the building.

He made a thick strand of four lengths of the aerial wire and fastened it around a chimney, pulled and hauled until he was sure it would hold his weight. Then, wrapping a handkerchief around his hand, he moved to the edge of the corniced roof and cautiously lowered himself, bracing his feet against the wall to take the strain from the wire. Agony flamed through his wrist as the metal bit through the thin handkerchief. Below him the cop paused and lit a cigarette.

Halfway down to the level of the next roof Mark swung inward below the cornice, then thrust sharply against the wall and released the wire.

For a breathless moment he sailed through space—then his feet struck the gravel roof of the Leames house and he landed in a heap, rolling over twice before he stopped.

He straightened, wincing as he picked tiny bits of stone from his bruised palms. He listened. There had been no alarm. The glass of a skylight glittered a few feet to his right. He tried lifting it, found it went up with a dim screech of rusty hinges. Below was yawning darkness. Mark took a deep breath and dropped through.

He fell loosely, his rangy body limp to cushion the fall. His feet, striking the invisible floor, stirred up a cloud of choking dust. He was in an attic room of some kind. The silence coiled around him with a palpable thickness, as if he could reach out and touch it. His eyes flicked to a thin line of yellow light that crept under a door—and then a flashlight went on like a bomb exploding in his face, blinding him with its bright glare.

A man's aged voice quavered: "Stand still, young fellow. Don't move! I've got a gun!"

Mark blinked at the flashlight's bright eye. He couldn't see a thing. "Take it easy," he suggested.

"Oh, Miss Letitia!"

"Now, listen—" Mark said.

"You stand still! I saw those policemen and I heard you drop on this roof. You're a crook, that's what you are!"

A woman's voice came, muffled through the door. "Yes, Henry?"

"I caught him, I caught him!" The old butler's voice cracked with shrill excitement. "I told you there was someone up here! I got him, Miss Letitia! You'd better tell those police. Tell them I caught him!"

MARK suddenly reached out and swiped the flashlight aside, grabbed at the old man's skinny wrist. A howl of terror echoed through the attic. Mark clapped a hand over the old man's mouth and snapped:

"Quiet, you fool! I don't want to hurt you."

The old man wriggled suddenly and Mark slapped his gun aside. It thumped heavily on the wooden floor.

"D-don't kill me," the old man whispered. "I was only trying—"

"Shut up." Footsteps sounded on the attic stairs. "Is there any other way out of here?"

"N-no. Miss Letitia — she — she's coming up here!"

A tart voice spoke from the doorway. "I already am here, Henry. Who are you, young man? And what are you doing here? You might let Henry go—the old jackass. He thinks he's a hero."

It was Miss Letitia Leames. She was framed in the lighted doorway like a buxom gray ghost, a cameo brooch nestling in the lace at her bosom. Her face was long and angular, sharp as an

axe. Her pale blue eyes settled on Mark's tall figure with frosty hostility. She tightened her mouth and snapped: "Well, speak up, young man. Who are you?"

Mark said: "I'm a cop." He palmed his badge, and the spinster took it, examined it carefully, and handed it back with a sniff. Mark went on: "I'm Detective - Lieutenant Gallant. There's been a murder next door in the Huxton, and we were looking over the neighborhood. I thought the killer had perhaps come across the roofs."

The butler made a frightened, whimpering sound. Nothing changed in Miss Letitia Leames' hatchet face. Mark might have been discussing the weather.

"And who has been killed?" she asked.

"A man named Nick Kavalla."

She was startled at last. "The gambler?"

"How do you know?"

"And why shouldn't I know?" she demanded. "He's that awful person who rented Emily Porter's house next door, with people slipping in and out at all hours of the night." She sniffed loudly. "He made poor Emily's place into a—a house of vice. I can't say I'm sorry to hear that Mr. Kavalla is dead. . . . Henry!"

"Yes, Miss Letitia?"

"Show Lieutenant Gallant the way downstairs—that is, unless he wishes to look around a bit. Personally, I don't think anyone got in here except you, Lieutenant. But if you think—"

"You're quite right," Mark said hastily. "I'd better get back to the Hoxton."

A CROWD had gathered around the glittering marquee of the Hoxton Arms, effectively screening Mark's departure from the Leames house. Thrusting his hands in his pockets, he

casually skirted a prowler car parked at the curb, crossed the street, and turned the opposite corner. A neon sign halfway down the block read *Hoxton Garage*. Mark went there.

The colored attendant bobbed his head at him and went after Mark's car in the back of the barn-like garage. He returned with a powerful new convertible coupe—the first purchase Mark had made with his inheritance. Scowling, he stepped from the shadows and slid behind the wheel.

A gun was jabbed hard into his ribs. "Hold it."

Mark froze. He caught a glimpse of the attendant standing popeyed, mouth agape. He moistened his lips and turned his head carefully toward the shadowy figure seated beside him—a slim, elegantly dressed man in familiar gray clothing, with a sharp ivory profile and a neatly trimmed moustache. A Police Positive bulked large in the man's hand.

"Hello, Ryce," Mark said. His voice was dull, hiding the swift activity of his mind. Aware of the purring motor, he quietly slid his feet on the clutch and gas pedals. "So now you're throwing a gun on me?"

Captain Ryce said tiredly: "You asked for it, son. What kind of games do you think we're playing?"

"You don't really want to know. Your mind is already made up."

Ryce sighed and removed his gun, held it on his knee. "I kind of thought you'd break for the garage and your car when we didn't find you at home. I'm giving you a chance to explain everything now, just to me. I don't like anything of what's been happening any more than you do, Mark. But this is murder, and you've got to admit that circumstances—"

Mark said bitterly: "You think I killed Nick Kavalla?"

"No, I know you didn't. Patrolman

Kopf noticed the bloodstains on the street and phoned in, then trailed them to the Hoxton Arms. I just want to know why Kavalla chose your place to die in."

Mark said flatly: "I don't know anything about it."

"Then why did you dust out?"

"That makes me look guilty of something, doesn't it? But all I wanted was just a chance to break the case. I wouldn't have a chance if I stuck around until my former pals on the Force showed up. You know what they've been thinking and saying about Kavalla's missing eighty grand. You've been thinking the same things—that I lifted the dough and somehow covered up with a phony inheritance. But I didn't. And now all I want is a break. I don't usually ask for 'em. But I need a couple of hours to look around and ask questions."

Captain Ryce's answer was harsh and flat with finality. "I can't do that, Mark. You've got to come back with me. You're suspended, pending an inquiry by the Commissioner's Board."

"I see," Mark said softly. He moistened his lips. "Can I ask you just one question?"

"What is it?"

"Where did Kopf first pick up the bloodstains Nickie Kavalla left?"

Ryce said: "They start at Twelfth and Watersby. Seven blocks away from your place. I told you I don't think you did it, Mark—"

"All right." Mark's face was a little pale. "I'm sorry, Ryce."

He drove his left arm sidewise suddenly, pinning the captain's to the back of the leather seat. Straightening, Mark's fingers darted for Ryce's big gun. The cop grunted, cursed with surprise. He threw his body aside, away from Mark, and the impact knocked the car door loose. Mark thrust down the clutch pedal, flicked the gear lever

down with his left hand, and grimly held on to the captain's wrist with his right.

"You fool!" Ryce gasped.

The heavy Police Positive went off with a crash that awakened wild echoes in the big garage. The bullet tore a huge chunk of plaster from the far wall. Mark twisted desperately, trying to gain the leverage. The captain's fist thudded painfully into his ribs. The gun went off with a second angry bellow, the bullet screaming harmlessly into space.

For an endless second the two men were locked in an unyielding struggle, neither giving an inch. Then Mark, braced for what was coming, trod the gas pedal. The heavy coupe lurched forward with a roar of released power, careening toward the garage doors. The captain gasped and slid sidewise off the smooth leather seat. For an instant his strained, white face was limned in the glare of light from the garage office. Then his face and shoulders slid away, out of the car.

Momentarily Mark glimpsed the captain sprawled on the cement floor, raising himself on one elbow with the gun in his hand. He had no time for further thought or regrets. The coupe hit the pavement with rising speed. Mark grabbed desperately as the wheel went spinning with the impact of the tires on the curb. He yanked with the last vestige of his strength.

The houses opposite, then a row of trees, and a mailbox danced a fantastic reel beyond the windshield. The coupe heeled far over on screaming, tortured tires. From a distance behind him came a flat report, and a bullet ripped through the canvas top of the car. Mark hunched low over the wheel and swerved the powerful machine around the next corner.

There was no sound of further pursuit. He took the next turn at a slower

speed, drove straight east for two blocks and then doubled south. No tell-tale headlights persisted in his rear vision mirror. Mark took a deep, relieved breath, knit his brows in a troubled frown, and relaxed behind the wheel. He headed the car back to the West Side and the apartment of Sally Cord, Nick Kavalla's adopted daughter.

SHE was small, she was trim, she had soft brown hair and enormous hazel eyes in a pale, piquant face. Just looking at her made Mark Gallant's heart trip like any schoolboy's. When she moved, it was with a light grace that accented her sweet, desirable figure. She sank into a chair and stared at Mark with pained, horrified eyes.

"So Nickie is dead? He died at your door?"

Mark nodded. It had taken him fifteen minutes to reach Sally Cord's apartment. Allowing another fifteen minutes for the ponderous police routine to get organized, he had just enough time to learn what he wanted before the cops would show. For Ryce wouldn't overlook interviewing the girl, who had been as close to Kavalla as anybody.

"I think Nick wanted to tell me something," he said gently. "Something that perhaps you might know. That's why I did what I did, Sally—slipping away from Ryce—to ask you about it before he got a chance to bother you."

The girl said quietly: "But I don't know anything, Mark. Nothing at all."

"Nick had enemies," he suggested.

She nodded slowly, eyes troubled. "I know. Nick was just a funny little Greek who lived on the fringes of the law, doing things that society frowns upon. But to me he was good and sweet and kind, Mark. He took me from an unpleasant foster home and made life good again for me. He never

asked or expected anything in return."

Mark frowned uncomfortably. "I can't help feeling that his death tonight is tied in with the money he missed after we raided his place," he told her. "Somebody has that eighty grand, angel, and perhaps that same somebody killed him when he finally tracked it down."

Sally Cord shook her head. Her lips trembled faintly. "Nickie never talked to me about his—gambling. He wouldn't let me know anything about his business. He insisted on keeping me clear of it all."

"Nevertheless," Mark said soberly, "that missing money is dangerous. The killer may not know that Nick never told you anything."

"You mean—?"

"I mean the killer might think you know as much as Nick did when he was murdered tonight."

The girl's red mouth tightened. "Mark, darling—I'm not afraid."

He stood up, pacing the floor restlessly. A little muscle jumped along the hard ridge of his jaw. His gray eyes were troubled, absently studying the design in the rug.

"Did Nick go to any newspaper offices tonight?" he asked abruptly.

"I—I don't know. I haven't seen him. He hasn't been around here for two days. Why?"

"There was a smudge of printer's ink on the back of his hand when I found him. I was just wondering—"

The girl was startled. "Printer's ink? He must have gone to see Bernard!"

"Fats Bernard?"

"That's right. He's the one who runs that nasty little scandal sheet. You know—the *Club News*."

Mark's dark eyes glowed. "Bernard was reported to be in Nick's place the night I raided it, although he wasn't in the lineup afterward, and we were

supposed to have nabbed everybody in the place." His mind raced swiftly over new possibilities. Sudden excitement made pressure steal along his muscles. The trail of Nickie Kavalla's bloodstains started at Twelfth and Watersby, and Fats Bernard's printing place was at Fourteenth, only two blocks away!

"Mark, what is it?" Sally asked.

"Get your hat, angel. We're going to pay Mr. Bernard a strictly unsocial call!"

THE editorial and publishing offices of the *Club News*, on Watersby Street, were located in the heart of a desolate and blighted area. The streets were empty, dull with gloom shed by dingy gas lamps. Mark eased the car slowly down Fourteenth, saw nothing suspicious. The building which housed Bernard's business was a three-story red brick front in sad neglect, with a dingy plate-glass window on the first floor and a detached stairway leading to apartments above.

Mark stopped the coupe near the corner and slid out. Sally Cord's face was dim and pale beside him. She was shivering quietly. He leaned over and gave her a quick kiss.

"Keep your eyes open, angel. At the first sign of a cop or anything suspicious, either toot the horn or blink the lights on and off, if I'm in sight. Got it?"

She nodded, whispering: "Be careful, Mark."

"Sure."

Crossing at the corner, Mark walked casually down the deserted street. A few lights were on in the apartments over the store fronts. Somewhere a radio droned out war news. A boy came down the sidewalk from the corner store, carrying a plate of ice-cream as carefully as if it were crown jewels on a velvet cushion. Mark slowed un-

til the boy was gone, then quickly stepped into the shadows of the recessed doorway.

The lock was a flimsy thing, yielding readily to the steel pick in his practiced fingers. Glancing back at the coupe parked near the corner, he saw its lights were out and Sally was invisible. Mark took a deep breath and slipped into the dark interior.

The smell of ink and paper was strong in the coiling blackness. He stood still until his eyes became adjusted to the dim light that filtered through the dusty, speckled window. He made out a battered rolltop desk, a cushioned swivel chair, a litter of papers in one corner under which, presumably, was a waste basket. Crossing the floor on silent feet, Mark bent over the desk, squinting. There were fresh scratches on the brass lock and one of the wooden slats was splintered. The drawers stood open and empty, and the pile of papers in the corner suddenly took on meaning.

Somebody had been here before him!

A chill prickled the short hairs at the nape of his neck. Whoever had ransacked the office might still be here. He stood like an image of stone, scarcely breathing. There was no sound in the dim, smelly office but the ticking of a battered alarm clock on top of the desk. Mark loosened the gun in his pocket, finally took it out and carried it in his hand.

There was a door at the back of the office, standing partly ajar. Inky blackness brooded behind it. Mark slid like a tall phantom toward it and peered down a rickety wooden staircase leading to the cellar and the printing plant. Nothing stirred. He took a long breath and started down the wooden steps, feeling his way cautiously before putting weight on his feet.

At the bottom he paused and found the light switch on the rough pine wall.

There were no windows in the cellar. He snapped on the light with a swift motion and ducked aside, gun ready should bullets spurt toward him.

Nothing happened. The cellar printing-plant was empty. It was a long narrow room littered with machinery, empty crates and rolls of pulp paper cradled on wooden racks. The smell of sawdust, grease and printer's ink was thick in the air. A brown door at the far end of the room was locked. Mark rattled the knob, started to try his pick on it, then shrugged and turned back to examine the room with a brooding eye.

Whoever had searched the office upstairs had done an equally thorough job down here. The entire printing plant consisted of a small electric-powered press, several cases of type, worn wooden benches and tables lining the walls. In one corner stood a filing cabinet, tipped over on its side and leaning crazily against a bench. Past issues of the *Club News* were scattered about as if by a tornado.

MARK scowled. He was on the right track, certainly. Somebody had come here, looking for something. But for what?

Gun in hand, he turned back to the press and stared puzzledly at the broken, pied type. The masthead of the little newspaper was intact, indicating that Fats Bernard had been preparing to run the next issue through the press. Why had it been destroyed? He searched further, a mounting perplexity crinkling his brow. Scattered carelessly on a table nearby was a stack of galley proofs. The marauder had overlooked these, somehow.

Mark sat down on a stool and ran his eye rapidly over the fragmentary snatches of unimportant items, noted prominent cafe society names, places and events. Two of the columns he

separated with a grunt of satisfaction and pocketed them.

He was ready to go when an acrid pungency crept slowly into his nostrils, barely noticed until a thin wisp of smoke curled snake-like down the cellar stairs and crossed his line of vision.

Fire!

Mark stiffened instantly—and without warning a gun muzzle was rammed into his back!

A deep, smooth voice, thick with satisfaction, laughed and said: "Got you, brother. Drop the iron."

The man prodded harder. Mark's fingers relaxed around the gun. It hit the floor with a metallic clang.

"Now stand up and take two steps straight ahead."

Mark got up and did this, then turned his head slowly and stared at the man with the gun. It was Fats Bernard, owner and publisher of the *Club News*. He was a huge man, even taller than Mark and well over two hundred pounds. His black hair was thick and straight, rising over a pink moon face with a snubby button nose and little black eyes. His shoulders were thick and wide, hunched forward a little over the gun in his hand.

Mark's glance flicked to the back of the cellar. The locked door was open now, showing a small cubby-like room.

Fats Bernard said: "It's a good thing you didn't get that door open, brother. You'd have been a dead duck."

Mark said softly: "So you killed Nickie Kavalla."

"That what brought you here?" The fat man grinned, showing large white teeth between curling lips. "Not me, chum. I didn't kill him. . . . What's the idea fanning my joint? You done a lot of damage."

"I didn't," Mark told him. His eyes moved from the big gun in Bernard's hairy fist to the man's sweaty face. "I

found it like this."

"You're t h a t copper—Gallant—aren't you?"

"That's right."

"What made you come here?"

Mark shrugged. "A hunch."

"What kind of hunch?"

Mark said: "I got an idea that *you* have the eighty grand Kavalla claimed was missing from his joint when I raided it. A dozen people reported you were there, and they aren't likely to have been mistaken. You're not hard to identify, Fats."

Bernard moved his gun a little. His grin was hard and fixed in the fleshy folds of his face. His eyes shone like little black marbles. "It must've been two other guys, brother. You didn't pull me in."

"I know you weren't in the police lineup. That's what makes me think you've got the dough. How did you get out of the place?"

"I wasn't there, chum."

"The house was staked out. A rat couldn't have slipped out without one of my men spotting it. But you got out, and nobody saw you do it. Because you *were* there." Mark's voice became rapping, insistent. His face was thin and grim and hard. "You snatched that dough and got away with it somehow, and Nickie Kavalla traced the hijacking to you. He came here tonight and upset the place hunting for it and you caught him at it and shot him. He got away and lived just long enough to stagger through the streets to me."

The fat man's grin was fixed and horrible now. His breathing made a soft gurgling sound in the taut silence. Mark stood still, aware of the stealthy, acrid pungency in his nostrils. He didn't shift his glance to the cellar stairs. Up above a fire was creeping steadily nearer, cutting off their one avenue of escape. If the wooden steps went up in flames, they would be caught and roast-

ed like rats in a trap!

Fats Bernard's voice bubbled: "You know too damn' much, Gallant. You're away off on some of the counts, but you're doing a lot of guessing, and I don't like it. I'll have to kill you, copper."

Mark shrugged his wide shoulders and made his voice sound flat and hopeless. "It doesn't make any difference. You'll die, too."

The fat man's head came forward. "Huh?"

"We're both trapped. The place is on fire. You can see the smoke on the steps yourself."

Color drained abruptly from the man's pink face, leaving it ugly and yellow. For one split second his eyes jerked to the cellar stairs.

Mark's muscles exploded with a burst of pent-up energy. He spanned the distance between them with two swift, pantherish strides. His left hand flicked out, slapped aside the fat man's gun. His right came up in a bone-cracking blow that hit Bernard's loose jaw. The big man went backward, his gun spitting flame at the floor. He hit the wall with a crash and came forward, eyes hooded, lips curved in a cruel, vicious line.

MARK struck again, sinking his left into the fat man's stomach. His knuckles encountered hard muscle, not the softness which the man's appearance had led him to expect. Bernard's huge fist crashed into the side of his head with the force of a pile-driver. Mark held on grimly, twisting the thick wrist in an effort to get at the gun. Like many fat men, Bernard's weakness lay in small, fragile bones. For a desperate moment the man's ponderous weight drove Mark backward, step by step. Then, as Bernard suddenly screamed on a high-pitched, womanish note, his wrist gave way with a snapping sound. His

gun fell from numbed fingers. His face convulsed with agonizing pain.

Mark scooped up his heavy automatic, reclaimed his own, and stepped back, breathing through his mouth.

"All right," he gasped. "You've had your play. Up those steps, Fats. We're taking a walk."

Terror joined the pain in Bernard's eyes as he glanced toward the cellar steps. Yellow smoke was pouring through the crack at the bottom of the door, thick and stinging in the acrid air. A faint crackling sound came from above.

"It's too late! We'll never make it now!"

"Up!" Mark repeated.

The fat man shuddered, held his broken wrist, and stumbled forward, coughing. A bright tongue of flame suddenly licked through the thickening smoke and retreated. The fat man hesitated, felt the prod of Mark's gun in his back, and lurched up the steps to the door, gripped the knob and flung it open.

Smoke gushed out in a thick wave, enveloping them in a suffocating cloud. Bernard paused and moved down one step, coughing and rubbing his stinging eyes.

"We can't make it!"

"Go on!" Mark yelled.

The fat man suddenly darted forward into the thick of the pall, his arm over his face. One whole side of the office was ablaze, little dancing devils of flame licking hungrily at the peeling wallpaper and scattered debris. The rolltop desk was a brightly glowing skeleton of framework through the black smoke. Mark felt blinded, choked by the intense heat. Dimly he made out Bernard's massive figure plowing toward the door. A little spark suddenly glowed on Mark's sleeve, burst into rapacious flame. Desperately he slapped it out, only to find an-

other on his shoulder, eating greedily at the cloth.

A gush of cool night air swept the flames aside with a roaring sound as Bernard yanked the front door open. Mark followed an instant later. He ducked as the plate glass window suddenly collapsed with a crash. Something nicked his cheeks with a sudden burning pain, then he was out on the street, gratefully sucking long breaths of silver-cool air into his lungs.

Windows were going up and lights were ablaze all along the street. A small handful of people were gathered on the opposite pavement. Mark paused, looked for Bernard's figure, and suddenly became aware of a continued cracking sound—this time not from the window. Bernard was running crazily down the street, looking over his shoulder and staggering like a blind man. From the corner came the roar of a motor. A car leaped like a bird of prey after the fleeing man. Repetitive bursts of gunfire lanced from the driver's window.

It was Mark's coupe—and Sally was in it!

He groaned in despair. Panic and bewilderment fought with clawing fingers in his mind. The coupe roared past and Mark leveled his gun to fire—and lowered it. He couldn't shoot with Sally in the car. He caught a glimpse of a dark figure hunched over the wheel, of another cowering beside it. Sally Cord's white, frightened face was turned toward him for a flitting instant—and was gone.

THE fat man was almost at the corner when he went down under a renewed burst of gunfire. He threw up his hands and suddenly spun around in a circle, crashed face-first into the wall of a building and slipped to his knees, his fingers clawing at the brickwork. The coupe swung in toward the curb. A

scream came from Bernard's lips. Above the crackling of the fire came the sharp staccato bursts of an automatic. The fat man began crawling, tried to stand up, and suddenly collapsed all at once, rolled over and lay motionless on his back, one foot trailing in the gutter. Mark's gun bucked savagely in his hand. He was running now, toward the dead man, squeezing bullets at the tires of the coupe. He didn't dare aim any higher. The car roared around the corner on screeching tires and disappeared.

Somewhere a fire siren screamed, off in the distance. Excited voices clamored in the night. A man ran across the street and grabbed at Mark's arm. Mark threw a savage punch at the dim face, and was barely aware of the man going down.

He kept running toward Bernard. Ten paces ahead, from a doorway near the dead man, stepped a thin figure. A woman. She paused by Bernard's sprawled body for a flitting instant, her face washed by the light from a street lamp. She was pale and wan, with a sharp bitter profile and small tired eyes that now were bright with panic.

Mark recognized her with a startled curse. Paula Bernard, Fats' wife! A poor, dim shell of a once beautiful woman, emptied of all will and life of her own by the dead man's ruthless domination. Mark knew her story as the whole town knew it. He had met her twice before, been struck by her cowed helplessness. But what was she doing here, at this time? And how much of her husband's business did she know?

He had no time to ask himself further questions. The woman darted around the corner and was gone, running breathlessly toward a cab-stand a block away. Mark raced after her without a second glance at the dead man.

Her cab was lurching out of line when Mark slammed open a door of the hack behind it and shouted at the startled

driver.

"Follow her! Police business!"

He settled back with a tired, despairing curse. It had been bad enough before, but he was in for it, now. There would be witnesses to give Captain Ryce the car's license number and it would be traced to him. He groaned as he thought of Sally. Whoever had killed Fats Bernard and set fire to the printing office while he and the fat man were down in the cellar had driven that death car, with Sally in it—taking her no man knew where. Questions seethed and bubbled in his mind, and always he returned with a sick feeling to the thought of the girl in the hands of a ruthless killer.

His fingers trembled as he lit a cigarette and leaned forward to guide the driver after Paula Bernard's cab.

MARK suddenly tapped the cabby's shoulder. "Stop here," he ordered.

"But you said—"

"Never mind. Let me out."

The cab ahead had turned a familiar corner. The marquee of the Hoxton Arms glittered just ahead. Mark paid off the driver and went up the street on foot, an inner excitement tightening his nerves.

There was no longer a crowd around the Hoxton Arms. The street was placid with nine o'clock solemnity. Paula Bernard's taxi was just turning the far corner up the street, and by the whine of gears Mark knew it was running in second, gaining momentum. So it had stopped and discharged its passenger.

But where?

His glance rode down the line of stately brownstone mansions and settled on the closed and boarded establishment that had been Nickie Kavalla's gambling house. His eye caught a dim splinter of movement in the areaway leading to the back of the place.

Sauntering casually past the Hoxton doors, Mark turned into the dark alley. Ahead of him the dim silhouette of the woman was outlined for a moment, then it turned left—into the closed house. Mark quickened his pace and followed, his hand on the gun in his pocket.

The side door was ajar. Mark stepped inside and waited in the thick darkness, listening. He was in the bar, the shattered mirror ghostly in the faint light. Everything was exactly as his raiding squad had left it two weeks before.

A faint scraping sound came from the corridor ahead. Then the creak of footsteps on the stairs, going up. Mark slid along in wraith-like pursuit. Paula Bernard's thin figure was just disappearing through a doorway beyond the ornate gambling rooms on the second floor.

A small brass sign bolted to the door panel read *Office—Private*. Mark halted in the doorway and listened carefully. There were little sounds of movement from the office. Recalling the layout from the time he had raided the place, Mark knew there was no other way out of the room. He had the woman trapped.

He waited for a long minute, then abruptly palmed the knob and stepped inside.

"Don't—" he began.

He paused, astonished.

The room was empty!

But that was impossible. Mark strode quickly to the window, looked puzzledly at the solid iron bars beyond the glass pane. She wouldn't have gotten out through here. The closet! He yanked the door open—empty. He cursed, said softly: "Paula?"

No answer.

Frowning, he studied the room, the big desk, the thick chenille rug, leather couch, the faint glitter of glass-framed etchings on the wall, the big colonial

fireplace. In the dim light the hearth looked clean, the grate covered with a thin film of dust. Then Mark made a sudden startled sound. There were several curious markings in the dust.

He struck a match and examined the brick firewall in back of the hearth. There were definite fingermarks on the brick. He crouched lower, and sighed with satisfaction as he spotted two curious little holes in the brick wall that fitted close against the floor.

Mark slid two fingers in each and lifted.

The whole back of the fireplace arose softly, soundlessly, without effort. Mark found himself on hands and knees staring into an empty, warmly lighted, rather old-fashioned sitting room. Brightness streamed into his face.

Without a moment's hesitation, Mark crawled through.

HE just had a chance to turn his head sidewise at a rustle of clothing above him. He caught a glimpse of the woman, Paula Bernard, her face white and contorted. Then something descended with crushing force on the back of his head, sent darkening pain through his whole body. He slid headlong down the smooth whirling sides of an endless funnel. He went out cold.

After a while he sat up slowly, his head throbbing. He felt sick. He closed his eyes and licked his lips, steadying himself with his hands flat on the floor. An aged voice quavered above him:

"He's come to, Miss Letitia."

Mark opened his eyes and stared. He was in the Leames house, in the same room he had crawled into through the fireplace. The old butler, Henry, doddered toward a *boule* liquor cabinet and took out a pinch bottle of Scotch and tumbler, looked inquiringly at Mark. Mark shook his head and stared at Miss Letitia Leames.

She was sitting placidly in a rocker, buxom in her lace and rustling silk, her face calm and smooth, eyes surveying him with a detached, clinical interest. A knitting bag lay on the floor at her feet. In her lap was a beautifully mounted .22 revolver. Her fingers touched it.

"Well!" she said determinedly. "So you are a thief, after all, young man. How did you get in here? And what happened to your head?"

Mark moistened his lips again and touched his forehead. His fingers came away slick with blood.

"Don't you know?" he asked.

"Of course not!"

The room was furnished in the plush era style. Heavy mahogany furniture, a pie-crust table with a white plaster statue posed on it, potted palms in front of tall shuttered windows. There were heavy velvet drapes over the windows. Mark's glance drifted casually by the second window, returned for a split instant as he thought he detected a stir of movement, and then touched Miss Letitia Leames' long, sharply chiseled face.

Miss Letitia said: "You are stubborn, I see. Very well. . . . Henry!"

The old butler started. "Yes, Miss Letitia?"

"Send Joseph up here." As the old man hesitated, glancing at Mark with apprehension, the spinster's voice hardened imperceptibly. "Don't be an old fool *all* the time, Henry. I'm perfectly capable of handling this young man should he show signs of, er—truculence. I have his gun and my own. Get Joseph."

"Yes, Miss Letitia."

The old butler tottered from the room. Miss Letitia Leames settled back with a sigh and examined Mark with a speculative stare. Mark stood up from the floor slowly and picked out a horse-hair seat, sank into it.

"I'm not a thief, Miss Leames."

The spinster sniffed. "We caught you once before, remember. This time you can't fool me with stories about being a policeman."

Mark's smile was lopsided.

"Nuts," he said.

She looked shocked. "What do you mean?"

"You heard me. You know what I mean—you murderous old hell-cat!"

There was no change in the lines of her gaunt face. She sighed faintly and picked up the little .22 revolver from her lap. She knew how to handle it. She pointed it at Mark, squinting one eye slightly.

"Wise guy," said the spinster.

There came a knock on the door and the butler returned with a burly man in a chauffeur's uniform. The man's brows were puckered and lined with fine scars, his mouth and nose brutal.

Mark said: "Hello, Germany. So you found a new racket, did you?"

The big man was startled, his eyes sliding quick questions at the elderly woman. Miss Letitia said snappishly: "Henry! Go downstairs and phone for the police. Then go to your room and stay there."

The chauffeur said: "Hey, Letty, are you nuts? Call the cops—?"

"Shut up. Go on, Henry!"

The aged butler left the room.

MARK settled in his chair, crossed his legs comfortably, and grinned. "I don't get it," he said.

"You will," Miss Letitia promised. "You and your girl."

Mark nodded. "By the time the cops come, I'm a gone goose—is that it?"

"You and your girl," the woman repeated. "You know too much."

Mark said: "I know that you and Germany Joe killed Nick Kavalla and Fats Bernard. You shot Nickie in Fats

Bernard's place when Nickie was there snooping around. He must have surprised you. He managed to get away and walk through the streets to my place—I was the nearest cop he knew. He didn't live long enough to tell me much, though."

"He talked to you?"

"Sure," Mark nodded.

The big man growled: "He's talkin' through his hat, Letty. Listen, Letty—"

"Shut up." The woman's eyes were hard and shiny, fixed on Mark's lean face. "Go on, copper."

"You went back to Fats Bernard's place after I left here the first time. Fats had already been around then, and when I came in he hid in a back room in the cellar. He wanted to know who'd torn his place apart. You set fire to the office above, hoping to trap the two of us and destroy the evidence you were afraid of."

"What evidence?"

"Proof that you were backing Nickie Kavalla's gambling joints. Proof that you were financing his rackets. Fats Bernard had the dope and he was shaking you down for it. That's why you couldn't let him live. That's why you waited outside his place and when he came out of the fire alive, you shot him down. You forced Sally to give up my car to you and used it to frame me tighter into the case."

"Any proof that Fats had is burned up now," the woman said hoarsely.

Mark's smile was hard. "Not all of it, baby."

"You—"

"I've got it. Some galley proofs. You overlooked them when you searched Bernard's office and cellar, not knowing much about publishing routines. I found the item Fats Bernard was going to print about you in his two-by-four rag. The item you were

afraid of and killed him for."

Mark took a breath, uncrossed his legs. The window drapes behind the woman stirred again, very faintly. He said with measured slowness: "I thought there had been just one person who had slipped away somehow when I raided Kavalla's place next door. Now I know there were two—you and Fats Bernard. Bernard, looking for a means of escape, went into Kavalla's office just in time to spot you slipping through the fireplace wall into your own house. He saw his chance, putting two and two together, and waited a moment, then followed you. He escaped by using your house, unseen by you. And when he went, he took with him the eighty grand that had been in Nickie Kavalla's office!"

"There must have been some unpleasant scenes between you and Nickie over that missing money. But Bernard wasn't satisfied with it. He wanted more. He saw a neat chance for endless blackmail—with you as the victim. Miss Letitia Leames, austere and respectable pillar of society—the backer of a gambling syndicate! He threatened to publish the facts if you didn't come through with blood money—so you killed him." Again the curtains stirred. "Killed him while he was helpless, blinded by smoke and unable to defend himself. But his wife, Paula, knew what he'd been doing; she knew the secret of the fireplace. She's the one who tipped me off about it."

Miss Letitia Leames moistened her lips. She held the little .22 steady. The big chauffeur had a gun in sight, too, covering Mark in the chair.

THE woman said: "Paula Bernard's a mouse. She doesn't worry me. With you out of the way, I'm in the clear. When the cops come in answer to Henry's phone call, you'll be dead. It will mean some risk, with a police

investigation—but I can take my chances. I'll have shot you in self-defense, thinking you were a burglar. As for any connection I might have with the place next door—no cop would even dream of it. If I've managed to fool that old butler of mine all this time, the police shouldn't prove too difficult."

"And Sally Cord?" Mark asked.

"She—ah—will drop out of sight—disappear quite mysteriously—tonight. Meanwhile, she is here, right in the next room. Joseph will take care of her before the police come."

She was going to fire. The .22 revolver was steady in her hand. Gone was the placidity of the spinster recluse. In its place, viciousness was stamped in every line of her face.

Mark said softly: "Now, Paula!"

Paula Bernard stepped from behind the window drapes. Her pale, thin face was twisted with hate for Letitia Leames. Her cowed demeanor had given place to a tense courage.

But she had no gun. Her hands were empty.

Joe was whirling, heavy automatic lifting to point at the thin woman. Mark left his feet in a long, powerful dive. His shoulders struck hard against the big man's stomach, knocked him backward. The gun went off with deafening blast in Mark's ear. Mark's fist slashed upward in a short jab. The man fell back with a yell of pain, tripped over a foot-stool and crashed to the floor. Mark went down with him in a furious tangle, reaching for the automatic in the big man's hand.

From across the room came the sudden crack of a .22, followed by a woman's scream. Mark glimpsed Paula Bernard sliding to the floor, Miss Letitia's figure standing over her, gun in hand. Her face was contorted behind the thin wisps of smoke leaking from her revolver.

Mark's eyes flashed. He rolled over,

dropped a short right on the chauffeur's jaw. The big man's body jerked once and went limp. Instantly Mark grabbed the gun, whipped an arm around the hood's figure, and pulled him in front of him.

"Hold it, Letty," he gasped.

She wasn't going to hold her fire. The little gun in her hand barked a death-note, sending a .22 slug into the chauffeur's body that covered Mark. The big man twitched, his head lolled loosely on his solid shoulders. Before the murder-mad woman could fire again, Mark had shoved hard, throwing the man's heavy body toward her.

Both of them were thrown back, off balance. Mark drove forward, a bullet searing his shoulder. There was no time for Mark Gallant to live up to his name now. He swung a hard right, caught Miss Letitia Leames on her jaw; and stood back to watch her fold up.

Mark straightened, blew ruefully on his knuckles, and cast a brief glance at Paula Bernard. A bullet had creased her scalp, knocking her out. She would be all right.

He turned to the door as a hesitant footstep sounded in the corridor. Mark opened it and pushed back the old butler with a gentle hand.

"I thought I heard—Miss Letitia—"

"Everything is all right, Henry. Which room is Miss Cord in?"

"Right there. But aren't you a—Miss Letitia said you were a thief—I thought—"

"Go downstairs and wait for the police, Henry."

"Y-yes, sir."

Mark turned toward the next room. Sally Cord was there, and her frightened eyes were warmed instantly by Mark's approach. Her arms went around him as soon as he cut the ropes that bound her.

The police didn't come for another ten minutes; but Mark didn't mind.

TOO TOUGH AND TOO MEAN

By ERIC HOWARD

Author of "The Gun-Moll Venus," etc.



Dunne's left arm shot out shoving the D. A. at Gladys just as she raised her gun, at the same instant, he fired through his pocket at Lacey!

*A slug in his heart might stop Dunne, nothing else would have . . .
Dunne was no cold blooded killer, no merciless law-hound, but he
always got his man!*

DUNNE didn't like the idea, but there was nothing else to do. He had to see Gladys Gould, he had to try to make her talk.

Because she knew, if anybody did, exactly who had triggered the gun that had dropped his friend, Phil Dudley, and who had paid the trigger-man for

the job. Gladys knew things like that, always. She was a smart girl, too smart.

And Dunne, who wasn't afraid of anything, was a little afraid of her.

He growled something under his breath, entered the swank apartment house where Gladys lived, walked into the elevator. It was a cold day, out-

side, and he had on a big overcoat, collar turned up, and a felt hat pulled down over his eyes. What could be seen of his face, between coat and collar and hat brim, was hard and set.

Dunne was mad, all through. He knew that was no way to be. Anger upset a man, ruined his calculations, threw him off balance. He should be cool and calm, a cold-blooded thinking machine running down Phil's killer, a perfectly coordinated mechanism swift to strike or to shoot when the time came.

Phil was not only his friend; he would also have been his brother-in-law. He had left Joan Dudley two hours ago.

The tall, dark-haired girl had been dry-eyed; too stricken to weep. She had clung to Dunne, her cold cheek against his, and had stared bitterly into space. Her brother had been her only relative; they had been unusually close ever since the death of their parents.

"I'll get him, Jo!" Dunne had promised.

That didn't help, he knew. But there was nothing else he could say, no way to lessen her grief.

It had happened last night, in the parking lot back of the Criminal Courts building. Phil had had a briefcase full of evidence; he had been on his way to the D. A., who had engaged him to investigate the gambling syndicate and the police graft tie-up, to turn over what he had gathered. He had told Joan, on the phone, that he had the goods at last.

He must have got out of his car, briefcase in hand, because he had fallen across the running-board, shot in the back, with the handle of the briefcase still in his left hand. He had tried to keep it. But the guy who shot him had snatched it, snapping the handle off.

No one had heard the shot or had paid any attention to it. There was no attendant on duty in the almost empty parking lot, reserved for official

cars. Phil had been dead for several hours before they found him.

Dunne got out of the elevator, walked down the thick-carpeted corridor to the front of the building. He got his anger under control, outwardly at least. Gladys was smart; he would have to be smart, too. No use shaking a fist under her nose, threatening her; she would laugh.

A fat, colored girl, humming a tune, opened the door. Dunne stepped in.

"I want to see Gladys," he said, shedding his overcoat and hat, handing them to the maid.

"Lawdy! She ain't up yet. She ain't even awake. She ain't had her cawfee. Nobody can't see Miss Glad at this hour."

"Is she alone?"

"Of co'se she's alone! She's in bed." The maid rolled her eyes. "You cain't go in theah!"

"For God's sake, Lily," came the throaty voice of Gladys, "what's all the noise?"

"This heah man—" Lily began.

But Dunne had already pushed open the bedroom door and walked in. It was an ornate room, full of expensive blond furniture, gold-trimmed mirrors, with a cream carpet that seemed a foot thick. Gladys Gould, in a sketchy, lacy night-gown, with her blonde hair in disarray, dark circles under her eyes that would be concealed a little later, sat up and stared at Dunne.

She was pretty mad, he knew by the flash of her greenish eyes, but she tapped her lips with her white, soft hand and yawned, then slowly smiled.

"Hello, Bill," she said. "You get around, don't you? Get me my coffee, Lil."

"Bring me some, too," said Dunne.

HE pulled a chair up close to the bed, sat down. Gladys wriggled a little, propped herself on two pillows and

looked at him. He was aware of her white flesh, her still-alluring curves. He remembered that he had almost fallen for her once; but he got wise to her in time.

"Hand me that dressing jacket, Bill," she said, pointing to a pink thing at the foot of the bed. "After all, I'm not in the strip-tease racket."

"You could be," he said, tossing her the piece of silk. "You still have everything."

She uttered her throaty, meaningless laugh. Lily came in with a tray and put it down on a small bed table. She poured two cups of coffee, sugared and creamed one for Gladys, glanced at Dunne.

"Black for me," he said.

When the maid had gone, Gladys lifted her coffee cup, looked at Dunne and said: "What brings you around so early in the morning, Bill? Or any time, for that matter? You've been neglecting me for one hell of a time."

"Oh, I don't know about that," he said easily. "I'm not in the money. I can't run around with a girl like you. You're out of my class. You play with big-shots."

"It costs money to live," she shrugged her shoulders. "What do you want?"

"You can help me, Gladys, if you will."

"Anything for an old pal," she said. "How?"

Dunne plunged in. "A friend of mine, Phil Dudley, got killed last night. Some rat shot him in the back, didn't give him any chance at all. You've seen Dudley around with me—a young fellow, good-looking, on the level, a fine boy."

Gladys's eyes narrowed a little. "Yes, I've seen him. A handsome kid. I heard he was working for the D. A. You guys take chances. It's a wonder somebody hasn't got you."

Dunne chuckled. "It isn't that they haven't tried," he reminded her. "Too tough and too mean, I guess."

"I don't get you. How can I help?"

Dunne leaned forward. "You get around a lot. You hear a lot. Phil had dug up a lot of dope on people in this town. I don't know just what. I've been busy on other things. Anyway, he had the goods on certain people. He was turning it over to the D. A. They must have been pretty scared. They had to stop him. So they did, with a slug in his heart—and grabbed his brief case. I thought a lot of him. I want two guys, Glad—the one who did the job and the one who paid off. I'm not stopping until I get them. The quicker I get them, the better for a lot of people."

He was watching her eyes closely.

"I don't know a thing, Bill," she said. "You've got me wrong. I'm just a singer. I don't know things like this. Nobody confides in me."

She was lying, of course. He put his cup down, stood up abruptly.

"Okay, Glad," he said. "Sorry I bothered you. If you don't know, you don't know. But it may be just too bad for some people in this burg! I may have to knock over a lot of guys to get the two I want."

She put out her hands, caught his, pulled him down.

"Don't take chances, Bill," she said. "I don't want to hear about you being picked up in an alley." She sighed. "You and I could have been pals—if you'd seen it that way."

He was aware, for a brief moment, of her strong sensuous appeal. Her stock in trade, he knew. What she was doing now was to try to get him to lay off by a combination of appeal and warning.

"You're out of my class, babe," he assured her, and freed his hands. "Be seeing you at Barney's."

He walked across the room, stopped suddenly. A framed photograph of a man had caught his eye. He picked it up and looked at it.

"Who's this, Glad? The latest boy friend?" he asked.

"He's a rich mining man from out West," she said with a shrug. "I met him at Barney's."

"I don't know any rich miners," Dunne said. "He looks like somebody else."

HE put the picture down, said, "So long," casually and went to the door.

"Wait a minute, Bill," Gladys said. "The D. A. ought to know what young Dudley had. He must have told him some of it. You working for the D. A. now?"

"No. On my own, as usual. Just a shamus." He shook his head. "No, he hadn't talked to the D. A. He was out of town, picking up info here and there, getting it all lined up. He had it ready. Somebody knew that. They didn't waste any time. If you see a leather briefcase, without a handle, kicking around anywhere, let me know."

"I'll do that, Bill," she promised.

But she didn't mean it.

Dunne shrugged into his coat, put on his hat and left. He had parked his roadster down the street. He walked down and slid under the wheel.

"A rich mining man from the West, huh?" he muttered savagely.

And drove down to headquarters, where he spent some time looking at the photographs, fingerprints and records of a certain Joe Lacey, recently released from the Rock. Joe Lacey was Glad's mining man; he had never been here before, but he was here now. Dunne had crashed into him, a few years ago, in Frisco. That was before the Feds had put him away. Nobody

had anything on him, then; they finally had to use the income tax evasion gag to get him behind bars. The record said he had got out a month ago. He had come right here.

Dunne grabbed a public phone in a booth and called Gladys's apartment. He wanted to be sure that she was still there. She was.

He said, "Look, Glad, don't mention my call, will you? I'm in a kind of spot. I don't want some guys to know I'm on this."

"Sure, Bill," she said.

He hung up and called Joan Dudley. He told her not to go out, not to let anyone in.

"The district attorney, Mr. Harris, phoned," Jo said. "He's doing everything he can to—to —" She choked up.

"I know, honey," Dunne said. "Remember, you stay home. I'll see you this evening."

She agreed and he went out to his car, swearing to himself. Harris! Hell, a stuffed shirt, a guy who had ridden in on a reform ticket and was afraid to go to bat. Even with the dope Phil had dug up, he would probably have muffed it. Dunne had told Phil that, but the boy was new at the business, eager, and looking for a chance to pull off something big. It would give him a rep.

Dunne drove back towards Gladys's apartment, parked down the street and waited for her to come out of the garage under the building in her cream and silver car. A conspicuous car, around town, and one she couldn't have bought out of what Barney paid her for singing sultry songs.

He was pretty sure she'd come out soon. In spite of what she said, she would want to tell somebody that he was in it and that he was talking about mowing down a lot of people to get two. She would want to go into a huddle with

some guy and discuss what should be done with a shamus named Bill Dunne. Even if her best friends and chief sources of income had nothing to do with rubbing out Phil, they wouldn't want Dunne going haywire and starting trouble—when they had the town in their pockets. Gladys was a very smart girl, too. She might see some loose money in this for herself. She was always picking up odds and ends of cash, this way and that.

She drove out, all right, less than half an hour after Dunne had parked there. He kept the cream car in sight and followed her out of town to Tony Carlotti's place. Nothing wrong about that, perhaps, because Tony served the best meals to be had any place and had a cellar full of choice wines and liquors. Everybody went there.

Gladys drove in, left her car and walked up on the porch of the old mansion Tony had converted into a roadside inn. Dunne had pulled up in front of an open-air fruit stand, across the boulevard. He saw a tall guy, nervously dragging on a cigarette, on one side of the porch. As Gladys walked in, the tall guy followed. Dunne was too far away to get a look at his face, but Joe Lacey was that tall.

THIS didn't help any. Tony had a lot of private rooms, upstairs, over there. Gladys and Joe would go to one of them to talk things over. Joe might be the trigger-man who had dropped Phil, all right, but unless he could get in there and hear what they said Dunne wouldn't get the name of the pay-off man. He wanted him even more than he wanted the one who used the gun.

He waited for a while, even bought a bag of fruit and ate some of it to make his stay there look all right. Some other guy might turn up, any minute, to join the party.

He didn't have to wait long. A new black sedan pulled up. Four men got out. One of them was the D. A., short, pudgy Charlie Harris, a born politician; another was his chief deputy. The other two were county officials, the assessor and the tax collector.

Well, that didn't mean anything, either. Just four of the boys out for lunch. They weren't the ones Dunne was waiting for.

But he was hungry, too. There was no law against a shamus eating alone at Tony's. And if anybody came to join Gladys and her boy-friend, he could spot him as well from the inside as he could from where he was.

He swung his car across the boulevard, parked and walked in. He saw that the four politicians had been given a big table at one end of the long room. He took a small table beside a window.

When the D. A. saw him, sitting there, he got up and walked over to him.

"Hello, Dunne," he said. "I wanted to get in touch with you. But they said at your office you wouldn't be in. This thing they did to Phil Dudley—it's terrible. I've put my two best men on it and the police, of course—"

"Sure," said Dunne. "Got any ideas? Know who would most want him out of the way?"

The D. A. frowned and shook his head. "That's the worst of it. I don't. It was his own idea—to get everything I needed and to bring it all to me, at once. I had confidence in him, let him handle it his way."

Dunne nodded. "He phoned you, told you he was bringing it last night?"

"Yes. I was working in my office, waiting for him, but busy with other things, too. He was late, I realized, but I didn't think much about it. Finally, I gave him up, decided to go home. I was really a little worried then. I was going down to my car when that janitor came running up to

me, told me they'd found Phil. It's terrible. The worst of it is, there are so many who might have—"

"Yeah!" Dunne said. "Six, I figure, at least. If I had your job, I'd bring all six in—and shake it out of them."

The D. A. looked timid and spread his hands helplessly.

"I can't, Dunne," he pleaded. "I can't do a thing like that."

"No, of course you can't," Dunne agreed.

The D. A. went back to his table. Dunne ordered a drink and a steak, took his time over them. He kept looking out of the window, waiting for someone to join Gladys. Nobody came. He frowned.

The four politicians were winding up their meal, Dunne was drinking black coffee. The D. A. got up and went to the rest room at the foot of the stairway. Dunne watched him idly. Waiters were going up and down the stairs, carrying loaded trays. Plenty of Tony's patrons wanted privacy.

Dunne lit a cigarette, took a long puff. Head back, he exhaled. But he was really looking at the stairway.

The D. A. was going upstairs, marching along on the far side of a tall waiter, keeping out of sight.

Dunne's eyes flashed, but he turned quickly and looked out of the window.

A moment later he pushed his chair back, headed for the rest room. But he also went upstairs. He caught a waiter at the top, shoved a ten dollar bill at him.

"Which room did Harris, the D. A., go in?" he asked.

The waiter's hand closed on the bill, his fingers pointed. Dunne swung down the hall.

AT the door he paused, put his head against the panel, listened. He heard the D. A.'s voice in a whine of protest.

"I can't raise that much. You didn't have to kill him! You got me into this, Glad, and now—"

"Shut up, dope," the other man said. "She got you into it, sure, fixin' a set-up for me. Catch on? You think she fell for you, you little pot-bellied punk? Nix. Not while I'm her man. The hell I didn't have to kill him! You told me to get that briefcase, didn't you? Okay. He had a rod in his hand. He was trying to swing around on me. And he was hanging on hard, too. I had to let him have it. What's the odds? It's lucky for you he's out. You couldn't handle him. So what? So you can collect at least a hundred grand just by keeping that dope in your safe or peddling it back to the boys. You're getting wise now, boy. You can make your job pay. And all we want is ten grand on the line, the rest when you get yours. Kick through."

"I can't raise it—"

"Okay! You're out, then. We're in. I'll take this briefcase down to the syndicate boys and peddle it myself."

"Give me time!" the D. A. pleaded. "I've got to go down now. The boys will think it's funny. That damned shamus, Dunne, is down there, too."

"Beat it," Joe Lacey said. "We'll give you twenty-four hours."

The D. A. opened the door. Dunne, his hand in his right pocket, stepped in.

The D. A. looked ludicrous. But what Dunne saw was the gun close to Lacey's hand and the gesture Gladys made to get one out of her bag. She got it too, and Joe made a grab for his.

Dunne's left arm shot out. He shoved the D. A. at Gladys just as she raised her gun. At the same instant, he fired through his pocket at Lacey.

He crippled Lacey. The mug dropped his gun; hit the floor. Gladys had fired, too. And the D. A. had dropped right in front of her; he had taken the bullet she meant for Dunne.

"I hate your guts!" she screamed at Dunne.

He was watching her, watching her reaction of fear when she realized she had shot Harris. But she would get him next. He could shoot her, as he had shot Lacey; but he didn't. Instead, he knelt down, looking at Harris.

"Dead," he said. "You killed him, Gladys. That's—"

She was pointing her gun at him. She was going to kill him, too. But he had surprised her by getting down that way to look at Harris. And he was ready to spring.

He shot towards her. His shoulder struck her at the waist. She went over backwards. Her bullet passed over his shoulder, well above him.

He caught her wrist, twisted the gun from her hand, slapped her hard and turned on Lacey as the man from the Rock tried to pick up his gun.

Dunne moved across the room, picked a briefcase without a handle from the floor, tucked it under his arm.

"Life insurance for me," he said. "As long as I've got this," he tapped it, "in a safe place, I'm safe in this burg. And if I want to give it out, it's dynamite. Maybe they'll put you and Glad in the same gas chamber when they turn it on. You ought to like that."

Lacey swore at him through tight lips. "I was going to get you tonight," he said savagely, "after Glad told me you were sticking your nose in. I wish

I'd got you last night. Damn you! We had everything—Glad had him eating out of her hand, he was getting the dope from your pal, and we were going to use it the smart way—Hell, I wish I'd got you in Frisco!"

"Sure you do," Dunne nodded. "Better men have tried."

His right hand was at his side. He thought of Phil, of Jo. Suddenly his fist shot up, crashed into Lacey's jaw and dropped him beside Gladys.

Tony was at the door, yelling. Others were pounding up the stairs.

"The cops, Tony," Dunne said. "We need 'em here."

He was going to miss Phil, he reflected on the way back to town. It was going to be hard to explain it all to Jo. But somehow he'd try to bring her through to happiness again. He had done nothing. He had merely tailed Gladys after spotting Joe Lacey's picture in her bedroom. As a lot of people said, he was a lousy detective.

It was really Phil who had done the job. For the last time he had seen Phil, the boy had given him a worried look and had said: "That Gladys Gould dame, at Barney's, is making a play for the boss. I don't like that. But I don't think he'll fall."

It was that that had sent Dunne to Gladys in the first place. Phil had been a real dick. He had even put his finger on the ones who killed him.

THE END

"I Talked with God"

(Yes I did—Actually and literally)

and, as a result of that little talk with God some ten years ago, a strange new Power came into my life. After 43 years of horrible, sickening, dismal failure, this strange Power brought to me a sense of overwhelming victory, and I have been overcoming every undesirable condition of my life ever since. What a change it was. Now—I have credit at more than one bank, I own a beautiful home, own control of the largest circulating newspaper in my county and a large office building, and my wife and family are amply provided for after I leave for shores unknown. In addition to these material benefits, I have a sweet peace in my life. I am happy as happy can be. No circumstance ever upsets me, for I have learned how to draw upon the invisible God-Law, under any and all circumstances.

You too may find and use the same staggering Power of the God-Law that I use. It can bring to you too, whatever things are right and proper for you to have. Do you believe this? It won't cost much to find out — just a penny post-card or a letter, addressed to Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Department 327, Moscow, Idaho, will bring you the story of the most fascinating success of the century. And the same Power I use is here for your use too. I'll be glad to tell you about it. All information about this experience will be sent you free, of course. The address again—Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Department 327, Moscow, Idaho. Advt. Copyright 1939 Frank B. Robinson.



Another shot winged by his ear, and then with desperate aim he flung the controller bar!

MURDER PLUS

By JOHN WALLACE

Author of "The Key to Doom," etc.

THEY walked rapidly, the girl at a half-trot to keep up with Nick's ungainly strides. Pavement heat, like the open doors of blast furnaces, eddied around them, wilting Nick's linens, whipping the girl's shimmering silk against her slim, lithe figure. Her clear ivory face, framed by a cloud of copper-colored hair, was cooled by the chill fingers of fear. Her hand, clutching Nick's warm, muscular arm, was rigid. From the corners of his eyes Nick glanced slyly and grinned. He said, "I get the idea. I'm Sir Gawain the Green Knight, or something. Maybe just a sap."

Her lips showed white. "I'm—I'm sorry, mister. I—"

"Sure. You're sorry. For what? For picking me up?"

Her eyes, wide, grey-green pools of luminous depth, swept him. Appraisingly. Measuring his compact breadth, his strong, square face, his close-cropped hair, dark with grey tendrils at the temples. Through all her evident fear, her glance was shrewd, missing no detail, checking off against some standard in her mind. And under that glance Nick Lynch was deeply stirred. Drawn, against his will, to seething inward excitement. But in the end her glance wavered. With an intake of breath she said huskily, "I'm sorry. Please don't make fun

Murder and arson would kill the kid's confession, for Nick figured a baby-faced bandit to shade a butcher every time!

of me. I did pick you up. I know what you must think. But please don't ask me to explain. I can't now. Perhaps some day—"

And then her hand stopped him. Before a remodeled tenement whose sign proclaimed "Apartments—See Janitor." Her foot touched the bottom step and her eyes scanned the street swiftly. Relief and returning color was in her face as she held out her hand. "I—thank you very much," she said simply.

Nick shrugged. "So now it's good-bye, is it?"

"I'm sorry. I hope I haven't—"

Nick's laugh cut her short. "You haven't. Not used to this sort of thing, are you? The big ox that I was tailing, the one that was tailing you, is just inside the door of that apartment house across the street. Up until you spotted him on the subway, he didn't know me from one of the strap handles. But he'll know me now—"

Her hand fled to her throat. "He—you mean you were following Sam? You mean he's over there, watching us?"

"I mean just that," Nick laughed harshly. "So do you mind if I come inside? I make an awful good target, standing with my back to him. And we ought to have a little talk anyway—"

She would have fallen if Nick's hand hadn't steadied her. She muttered something and motioned for him to follow her up the steps. Inside the door she turned, and her frightened, peering eyes saw the man across the street. Out on the sidewalk, now, scowling. A great blonde ape with fists as big and bumpy as taxi fenders. A slab-like face in which cold fish-blue eyes showed unwavering menace. Gasping, the girl drew back and began resolutely to climb.

On the upward toil Nick crammed

his mystified cranium with rapid and unpleasant thoughts. Yesterday, it was, that the Old Man had started him on Sam Stratton. "Stick to his behind like a plaster," the Old Man had growled. "Sooner or later he'll lead you to Sloane. Sloane's been up to something. The Industrial Trust wants him. When you hole him, call for help. This is too big for you to handle alone."

That had been yesterday. Nick had turned in a sterling performance of tailing the blonde baboon. A half-hour ago the break had come. A phone call by Stratton from a White Front on Seventh Avenue. And then the subway. And then, just because he'd been standing near the girl when she sighted Stratton, everything had been gummed. Now he'd have to call the office and ask for Jimmie Boyd. The Old Man would give him merry hell.

She stopped at the third landing. Hesitated only a moment, casting a questioning glance at Nick Lynch while she fumbled in her bag. Fleeting, half-veiled by lashes.

Nick growled, "Whatever you got is safe with me. I'm bonded."

Her face vied with the color of her hair as she inserted a key in the door marked 3B. She said quietly, "Come in, please."

One of Nick's hands held his hat, the other was holding the door as he stepped across the threshold. He had no chance to draw. He saw the slim kid standing in the center of the room. The kid had a hand on the radio, turning the knob so the music would come louder. In his right a pistol looked as big as a hammer.

The kid said, "Shut the door."

THE copper-haired girl gasped and went white as laundered linen. She slipped a little to the side, groping for a chair that she didn't quite make. With a tired sound she folded on the carpet.

The slim kid motioned with the pistol. He said, "Come in the room."

Nick had no choice. He thought of a few of the names the Old Man would have called him. Narrowly he watched, noting that the kid had practically no chin under bad teeth which he was sucking without much enjoyment. His face was flushed and his eyes were baleful triangles that were out of focus. A hop head, Nick told himself in disgust. Charged to the edges.

The slim kid's trigger knuckle was white. He said, "Whadda you want?"

Nick waved his hat. "Look here, bud. I don't know what this is all about. I was riding on the subway and this dame gave me the eye. 'Hello, Mr. Stanley,' she says. And then she asks me to supper. And I never saw her before in my life."

The kid batted his eyes at the girl. He said, "Yeah?"

"Honest to God, bud. I'm not looking for any trouble. If I'm butting into your private property I'll butt right out again. It all happened just like I said."

The kid sucked his teeth and his eyes wavered between Nick and the girl. She was beginning to get her wind back. She was groping for the chair again, eyes closed, tears showing under her lashes. The kid made a noise with his mouth and weighed the pistol. He said,

"Well, now, Deacon. You look like a right kind of a guy. You look like you got your feet on the ground. I don't want to have no trouble with you, neither. Just you set down on the sofa a minute until I figure things out."

Nick sat on the sofa. It was wide and deep and under other circumstances might have been comfortable. On a magazine rack at one end technical journals of the printing trade were piled. There was a calendar on the wall, with the picture of an English Set-

ter and the caption under it "*Charles Emory, Fine Printing*," and a Seventh Avenue address.

The girl seemed to have pulled herself together and she appeared as though she'd like to ask some questions. But the kid didn't give her a chance. "Where's Sam?" he growled.

The tip of her tongue circled her mouth. "I—I thought he might be here."

"Yeah. You thought. I suppose that's why you picked this guy up."

She stiffened. "You can't talk to me like that!"

"Oh, I can't, can't I? Look here, you—"

A noise from the door stopped him. Two quick thumps and a little later another thump.

The kid waved the pistol at Nick Lynch. "You, Deacon, just set right there and don't make no moves or I'll blast your—gizzards out."

He turned to open the door and in that moment Nick got his gun out and put it inside his hat.

THE radio was blasting away with *So Now At Last I've Found You*. Nick watched the girl narrowly. Her eyes were fixed on his in a pleading appeal not to use the gun. He shrugged. At the door the kid was talking to somebody. Stratton, probably. It wouldn't be too smart to plug the kid in the back. He'd slip down and furnish a cover for Stratton and then the kill-crazy ox would get his heater out and puncture Nick like a potato strainer. He wished the girl wasn't so damned close.

The palaver at the door ended and the kid came back. Slowly, a mean look in his eyes, the pistol ready for business. Nick squeezed and threw himself sideways and to the floor. The shot made a terrible racket and opened up a wicked hole in the kid's belly. Lead came back, but Nick's slug had knocked

him sideways and the only damage he did was to the plaster. He sat down, looking surprised, holding himself together and cursing softly. Nick heaved the magazine stand at the girl and an *Inland Printer* slapped her ear and she sprawled on the floor.

Shots came through the door. Scattered, like whoever was doing it was hopping around a lot. Nick wasn't scratched but he let out a scream for effect. Whoever was outside tried the doorhandle, and Nick, aiming low, squeezed again. The .38 ripped through the plank and a howl went up.

The kid was weaving in a slow circle, trying to draw a bead, and Nick flung a sofa pillow at him, following it with a thrashing heel drive that pushed his chin back a little farther and made his shot bring down more plaster.

Nick was on the phone, then, dialing the Old Man. "Mabel?" he yelled when the call came through. "Mabel, tell the Old Man to send Jimmie Boyd. 500 East Seventy-Sixth—"

"But Mister Taylor. They ain't here. They—"

"Make a tour of the honkey tonks. Drag the rivers. Find 'em!" He hung up as police whistles sounded from the street.

The girl was sitting up, rubbing her neck. Nick yelled, "How do we get out of here?"

Vaguely she pointed to the kitchen.

He was pushing her through to the fire escape when he heard whistles on the stairs. From a neighboring building a head was popped out and back in again at the sight of Nick's drawn gun. They were in an alley, scaling a board fence, when a slug from a Police Positive tore a sizeable chunk of meat from Nick's left shoulder.

Nick leaned back, steadying himself against the cab's cool leather, while the girl went into a drugstore for Lysol and cotton and adhesive. A harness cop

meandered by, swinging his stick, and Nick tried to look as if he might be a little tight instead of sieved and shaky. The girl came back with the first aid and he told the driver to forget things about ten dollars worth and drive through Central Park.

The girl's grey-green eyes were wide as she peeled his coat and went to work. The sight of the blood gave her the shakes and Nick dug his fingers into her knee to keep her steady. After a moment's probing she said, "It looks like the bullet just made a notch. It's—"

Nick leaned forward and shoved the muzzle of his pistol against the back of the driver's neck. "I said Central Park. Not the nearest police station."

The driver's eyes, scared and pleading, showed in his mirror. "Jeeze, fella. I gotta live in this town. I gotta keep my nose clean. The Commissioner—"

Nick showed the driver his badge, and its gleam snapped him to attention. "Central Park? Yes, sir!"

The girl did a fair job of patching and when it was over Nick tried the arm experimentally. He could use it. He could use a clean shirt and another suit too, but he didn't dare stop now. He had to pick up Stratton again. The Industrial Trust wanted Sloane, and the Industrial was the Agency's best customer. If he bungled this case, the Old Man would crucify him. The girl had put him in a merry mess. The girl—Nick said,

"Listen, sister. You start talking, and talk sense. The time for your act is over. You put the finger on me for Sam Stratton, didn't you? You knew I was a detective. He knew he was being tailed. So he telephoned you from Times Square and told you to follow him on the subway, to pick out the guy that was tailing him. Well, the guy was me. And you damned near had me blasted. What's the game, sister?"

She drew back into the corner and her eyes were dark with anger and fear. "That's a lie!" she said hotly. "I didn't know you were a detective! I didn't put the finger on you! I only picked you out because you looked decent and honest. I didn't know Sam was on that train. If I had I'd have walked—I'd have crawled just to get away from him—"

Either she was a very fine actress or she was telling the truth. Nick said stubbornly, "That hophead in the apartment you took me to—Who was he? Why did he try to blast me?"

SHE clenched her hands until the knuckles showed white. "He—his name is Leo. He is a horrible person. I loathe and detest him. He must have been waiting for me—"

Nick shook his head. "Sister, you've got to tell me the story. You've got to tell me why you are so afraid of Stratton, why you picked me up, what Stratton's game is."

In her corner she seemed to wilt. As if struck with a fist she cringed. "Please—I can't tell you. You must believe in me. You must give me a chance—"

"A chance for what?" Nick said harshly. "Stratton works for Sloane. Sloane is a counterfeiter. Half his life has been spent in jail. He's back at it again. That apartment you took me to belongs to a printer. That means Sloane is getting ready to manufacture again. Now, you know this printer, and you know Stratton, and you know that punk kid that tried to poison me with lead. The only chance you want is to beat it."

Suddenly her white face was thrust against his. "No! Please believe me! Charley Emory, the man whose apartment I took you to, is my brother. I must protect him. You realize that, don't you?"

Nick's piercing eyes held on her un-

wavering ones, reading, probing, weighing. The girl was telling the truth. Her brother was in a jam. She wanted to help him. Sloane, a counterfeiter, was putting pressure on him. But why was the Industrial Trust so interested? Queer shovers were Federal meat. There was something more here than met the eye. Relaxing, Nick said gently, "All right, sister. I'll take a chance on you. If your brother walks back into that mess at the apartment before he has a story fixed up, the cops in this man's town will slap him into confessing murder and arson. So we're going to stop by a drugstore while you call him."

A great wave of relief surged through her, raising her head until her clear eyes misted. "You—you'll do that for me?"

"Yes. Tell him to come to my apartment. Seven Ten Lexington. We'll try to patch up a story for the cops."

Suddenly her hand was on his, squeezing in mute thanks. Idly he noticed that her hands were supple, tanned from exposure. And on the fourth finger of her left was a ring of white where a golden circlet had recently been. He shrugged.

"Stop at a drug store," he signalled the driver. A street entrance loomed, and while they were clearing the Park the girl touched his shoulder gently. "I'm sorry I've caused you so much trouble," she said huskily.

Nick grinned. The cab slowed and the girl, leaning over swiftly, kissed him full and lingeringly on the lips, pushing her hands against his chest, withdrawing with swift movement. "I hope someday you'll understand everything," she whispered as the cab stopped and she climbed from it.

He stared in astonishment, brushing the back of his hand across his lips, watching her lithe figure as she moved with the grace of a dancer. And when it dawned on him that she had walked

past the drug store instead of into it, he told the driver to go like the hammers of hell to Seven Ten Lexington.

THERE was a jar of cold tea in the refrigerator and Nick poured a quantity of it into a glass that held a double shot of Scotch. Whipping a tie to the neck of his fresh shirt he climbed into a tweed jacket without wincing. He spun the cylinder of his .38 and stuffed cartridges into the empty holes. Then he ignored the telephone which had begun to sound off imperatively, and on a scratch pad on his dresser wrote: "*Al—Working. Call McGonigle and have him ready. Nick.*"

Al was the roommate and McGonigle was a bondsman. Nick, moving into trouble, knew he could no longer expect any help from the Old Man. In the Old Man's eyes he had already failed.

The phone was issuing angry sputters again and Nick silenced it by laying it on the table. Half-way to the door the voice sound stopped him. Weakly he said, "Hello, skipper."

"Damn you, Lynch! You and your ——— monkeyshines! I told you to keep your ———"

"Lay off, skipper. It wasn't my fault."

"Fault? You've given the Agency a black eye, shot up a man, bungled the case, lost your lead, got yourself in a fine ——— mess!"

"Sorry, skipper."

"Sorry?" The explosions of venom redoubled. "How d'you think I feel? Carter'll skin me alive. We'll lose the bank— Our best customers—"

"What'd Carter expect us to do?"

"He expected us to get Sloane, you fat-head! But that needn't bother you any longer. You're fired!" And the receiver banged deafeningly.

Nick grinned sourly. He thought, so I'm fired and Carter'll skin you alive.

Well, he'll find it damned tough skinning. Carter—Picking up the phone again he dialed swiftly. Presently a cultured voice came through, "This is Mr. Carter's residence."

"This," Nick said, "is James Morrissey. I'm an attorney and I must speak to Mr. Carter at once."

"Mr. Carter is at dinner and does does not wish to be—"

"You tell Mr. Carter this is about a man named Sloane. He'll be disturbed, all right."

There was a pause. Then another voice, harsh, cold, forbidding: "What's this about Sloane?"

Nick said, "My name is Morrissey and I'm an attorney. I represent Mr. Sloane. Fifteen minutes ago a bunch of ham private detectives broke into his apartment without a warrant and arrested him. My client—"

A chuckle came over the wire. "So they got him, eh? Good!"

"Oh, you think so, Mr. Carter? Well, let me tell you my client will sue your bank for false arrest. For one hundred thousand dollars. You haven't a thing on him and you know it."

"No?" Carter's voice dropped into a snarl. "Listen, you ambulance chaser! This man Sloane counterfeited shares of Amalgamated Motors Stock and took them to a bank and pledged them as collateral for a loan. He made just one grave mistake. We happen to be registrars of that stock, and the bank he took it to is a correspondent of ours. So you can sue until the grass turns pink—"

Nick Lynch hung up and bolted for the door. He was in a cab, headed up Lexington Avenue, when a squad car sirened to a stop and a brace of bulls charged into the door of Seven Ten.

It was quite dark and a drizzling rain was in the air when he arrived at the address of the printer's calendar. "Charley Emory is my brother," the

girl had said. "I've got to protect him—" But she herself had refused Nick's offer of help by taking a runout powder. Was it because she didn't trust him? Or was it because she was as deeply involved as the others? As a member of the gang, had she put the finger on him? Or was she telling the truth?

THE Seventh Avenue address was a loft; high, old and devoid of light. Advertising signs of firms flanked the doorway, but none showed the name of Emory. A black and dirty directory in the hall showed more vacancies than anything else, but Charles Emory's name was not there.

He would have gone for a 'phone directory then, but the sense of passing time urged him to action. Growling, he plunged into the stairway of the building on the left.

And then his heart leaped. A sign, nailed below two others on the wooden door, said what he wanted it to say. Reaching under his armpit he loosened the .38 and started up.

At the top of the second flight he found it; a faded card that read *Charles Emory, Fine Printing—Walk In.*

There was no light behind the door. There was no sound. The handle turned but the latch did not yield. Stuffing the butt of his pistol in his hat he broke the glass. Inside, he cursed savagely. There was nothing in the place except dust, filth and empty darkness.

Back in the street again he spread himself in front of the first loft. This was the place. He was positive. Emory must have moved. He glared at the doorway, and suddenly he whistled.

Claw marks in the grimy wood showed where a sign had been rudely and recently removed.

He was in the hallway, then, going over every inch of the Directory. Half-way down he grunted. His finger

flicked out and his thumbnail pried up a corner of sticky black. When he had finished, three lengths of electrician's tape were in his hand, and the legend *Emory Printing—Fourth Floor* showed dully against the board.

Down the hall the doors of a service elevator stood closed. From the shaft came the dull rumble of machinery.

Pistol in hand, Nick started up the smooth-worn iron stairs.

He was crossing the second landing when an object swished through the air and landed with electrifying pain against his injured shoulder. The pistol popped from his hand and slid across the floor. Another *swish* and the heat in his brain exploded to myriad lights before his eyes.

Nick grappled savagely. The fellow was huge and muscled with bands of steel. Not so much as a grunt issued from his lips as he tried again to bring the sapper into play. This would be Sam Stratton, covering an outpost. This would mean that he was getting close to Sloane at last.

Stratton's great body heaved, flinging him away, and then charged in with silent, relentless fury. Nick slipped down, and Stratton's rush carried him over and against the wall. Before he could turn, Nick had the big ox's ankle between the heel of his right foot and the arch of his left. Stratton crashed to the floor.

They rolled, fighting soundlessly; little man against big; jab against crush; Stratton swinging futilely with the leaded leather; Nick pouring short, ineffectual punches into the huge man's frame. He was tiring fast now, his hurt arm almost useless. Stratton shifted suddenly and raised his hip, and Nick went flying through space.

The open doors of the elevator swallowed him, and with a jarring thud he brought up against the other side. And almost at once the platform beneath

him began to move upward; in passing, his flying feet or a shoulder had struck the starter.

In the semi-darkness he saw Sam Stratton's evil face outlined by the hall window. Stratton was trying to scramble aboard. Miraculously, he made it. A headlong leap had sent him through the diminishing space, and the battle was on again.

The elevator gathered speed, hurtling upward through the dark shaft. The machinery noises were louder now as the fourth floor neared. Savagely, Stratton jumped feet first, trying to crush Nick's skull. Nick rolled aside and as the big man landed he struck the controls and the elevator shuddered to a stop, changed direction.

Nick was on Stratton's back now, his good arm wound around the other's windpipe. Jabbing with his knees he put every ounce of his waning strength into leverage. Slowly, Stratton's head came back.

The big man's breath whistled through the hole that was his mouth. Flopping like a tarpon, he charged in mad rushes, attempting to brush Nick from his back. Against the netting of the cage, against the uprushing wall on the open side, against the controls, changing direction again. But Nick held, and like sands from an hour glass the strength ebbed from Sam Stratton's giant limbs. Finally he was done. With a moaning sigh he crumpled, and Nick was off him in an instant. Just as the elevator threatened to go through the roof he brought it to a stop.

From below the machinery sounds had stopped. "Sam!" an imperative voice floated up. "Sam, what the devil's going on?"

NICK primed his dry throat. "Nothin'," he growled, turning his voice down the shaft. "That damned dick jumped me. But I fixed him."

"Sure you're okay?"

"Hell, yes. Soon's I tie him up I'll be down—"

In the shaft beneath a door rolled shut. The sound of machinery was resumed, and Nick breathed a great sigh of relief. So far so good.

But multitudinous problems faced him now. Stratton would return to consciousness at any moment. And he was unarmed. He had lost his pistol somewhere when Stratton first tackled him. He had yet to face Sloane and Charley Emory. And maybe the girl. And he had to work fast. Where the devil were Jimmy Boyd and the Old Man? Where, for that matter, were the cops? Surely they would have found out by this time who the owner of the apartment was in which the shooting had occurred, would have traced him here.

Swiftly, Nick moved. Running the elevator between floors so that just enough space remained for him to squeeze out, he removed the control handle and closed the door.

Armed only with the short piece of metal he started on wobbly legs for the fourth floor and the rest of Sloane's gang.

Behind the half-opened door dim light showed. Mechanical sounds came out. And the sound of voices. Nick, hand on knob, paused swiftly and drew aside, flattening himself against the wall. The vertical oblong of light widened and a long shadow spread across the hall.

Sloane stood there, looking speculatively toward the stairs. Prison pallor still pinched his face; his moustache drooped in a smaller mockery of his drooping shoulders. His lean body twitched as he shouted "Sam! Come up here—"

The control handle of the elevator descended and found its mark behind Sloane's ear. Without a sound the lean

man crumpled, and Nick Lynch's tortured arm supported his sagging knees.

Inside the office the machinery sounds were stilled again. "What was that?" a voice called sharply. Feet pounded on the floor, and in the glow of the green-shaded desk light a baldish, chunky man in printer's apron suddenly appeared. At the sight of Sloane, inertly held before Nick Lynch, he skidded to a stop. His eyes, beady behind tortoise-rimmed glasses, popped at the sight of gleaming metal in Nick's right hand.

"That's better," Nick said coolly. "Turn around."

The stocky man obeyed, raising his hands as he did so.

"Now march. Back in where you started from," Nick commanded.

Through a door that showed the ends of paper shelves the stocky man marched, and behind him Nick supported Sloane. Imposing stones, type cases, platen presses cluttered the place. The stocky man swayed as he turned into the room, and suddenly his arm shot out. There was a rending crash and a typerack spewed cases in Nick Lynch's path.

"Get him!" the stocky man screamed and flopped to the floor.

A shot whistled, and in his arms Nick could feel Sloane's body jerk. Another shot winged by his ear, and then with desperate aim he flung the controller bar.

A THUD sounded, and a moaning scream. On the other side of the imposing stone Nick saw a man clawing at his face with agonized fingers from which a pistol had dropped to the floor. Thrusting Sloane aside he cleared the debris of type and cases, hurtling, throwing himself on the pistol. And then he was up, turning the gun on the fellow in the apron, moving aside to cover the groveling gunman whose face

he had smashed with the short iron bar.

"Turn around and put your hands up!" he commanded tersely, and once again the stocky man obeyed. But this time the fight was gone out of him. Shivering, he faced the shelves and moaned abject curses.

Nick strode to the gunman who was writhing on the floor, and with quick contemptuous movement pulled his hands away from his injured face. And then his senses reeled and he stared in unbelief.

"Jimmie Boyd!" he gasped.

The man who had been a detective was a pitiful sight. The iron bar had caught him squarely, mashing his nose and tearing his right eye to shreds. Blood welled from the wounds, flowing down his chin and covering his shirt front in a steadily spreading stain of red.

"So this is how it is," Nick said dully. "I begin to understand a few things. You—"

"Water," Boyd moaned. "Give—me—water—"

Nick stood, scowling down. "So you're the one tipped off Stratton that I was tailing him. You're the one that influenced the Old Man to let you take the case after I'd holed Sloane. And you're the one that called the cops on me after Leo had been shot up. Why, you rotten ——— Where is the girl?"

"Water— give me some water—"

Eyes blazing, Nick leaned forward. The pistol in his hand was clubbed, raised to strike again that bloody mess that had been Jimmie Boyd's face. "Where's the girl?" he repeated hoarsely.

Jimmie Boyd pointed a wavering finger. "Over there—locked in closet— Give me some water—"

Angrily, Nick turned to the ink-smeared basin and drew a glassful from the tap. He dashed the contents into Boyd's dripping face, drew another and

thrust it into his shaking hand. Then he swiftly crossed the room. A key was in the lock and he turned it, and in a moment the bound and gagged copper-haired girl was in his arms.

Gently he removed her bonds. From the street a siren wailed and the bleat of whistles echoed from the stairwell. "Are you all right, honey?" Nick said.

The girl sat up, brushing a hand across her fear-filled eyes. "I guess I'm all right," she said huskily. She looked around the room, contemptuously at the aproned printer whose hands were abjectly raised. Then a little cry escaped her throat and she ran to the still figure of Sloane. "Daddy, oh daddy—"

Her head was nestled on his shoulder, and as the wagon rolled around a corner, he put his good arm across her back. She made no effort to withdraw, resting against him. Suddenly her head raised. "I—I hope that by this time you understand—"

Nick grinned and swallowed to get his heart out of his throat. He said, "I think I do. You told me Emory was your brother. But he isn't. You didn't want me to know that Sloane was your father, that you'd been trying to make him go straight, and you hoped you could still stop him from flooding the country with bogus stock."

SHE sighed. "That's it. Daddy had straightened out. He was all right until Stratton showed up. And then—Sam used every trick he knew, every mean little thing he could think of to get daddy to go wrong again. He—he even used me."

"You?" Nick gasped. "What could he do to you?"

She sat erect and her clear grey-green eyes were lusterless and dull with pain. "Sam Stratton," she said, "is my husband."

"You—you mean you're married to

that big tramp?"

"Yes. He forced me into it. He promised me that if I'd marry him he'd leave daddy alone. And then he cheated me. Oh, he was clever. It took me a while to find out. But that day I—It was today, wasn't it? Well, today Leo came to our apartment. I'd never met him before. He was nasty—drunk or full of dope. He accused Sam and Daddy of cheating him. Said they were working with a printer named Charles Emory, getting ready to shove some queer, and they had doublecrossed him. So I knew then that Sam had gone back on his word. I tried to find daddy and couldn't. But I found Emory. I told him what had happened. He gave me the key to his apartment and told me to go there while he located Sam and Daddy and talked things over. I was on my way when I bumped into you—"

The wagon rounded another corner and its chime redoubled. On the opposite seat a wagon cop scowled at Nick Lynch, and Nick grinned back.

In his arm the girl stirred. In a low scarcely audible voice she said, "I guess it was the best way out for him. He had gone too far—Where are we going?"

"To the stationhouse, sweetheart," Nick said. "To get things straightened out finally. Only this time you don't have to kiss me goodbye, because I'll be right beside you—" Breaking off, he scowled suddenly. "Say," he growled. "It just occurs to me I don't even know your first name. But if you get clear of that lug Stratton, I have an idea of what the last one will be—that is, if—"

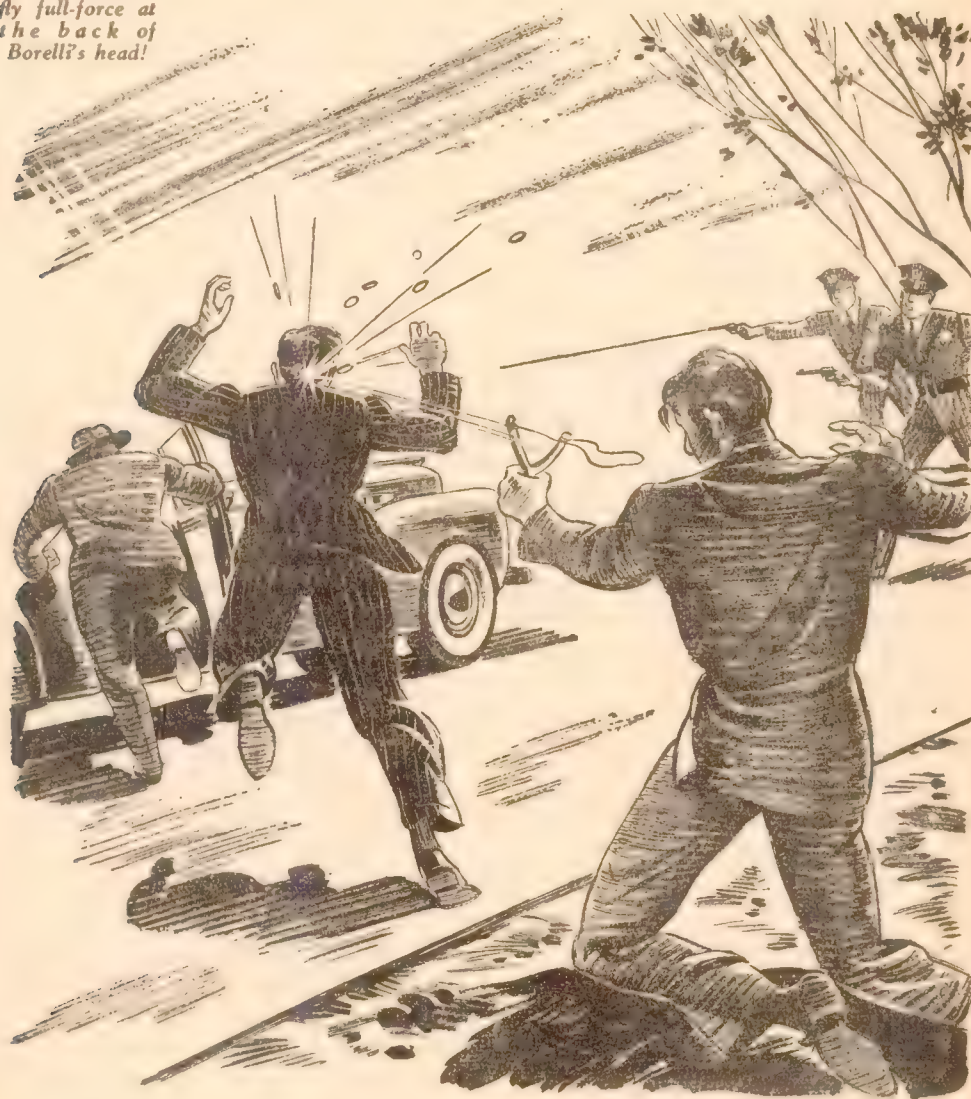
The wagon cop, glaring down his plentiful nose, snorted in disgust. "I seen a lot of stuff go on in this buckboard," he announced to nobody in particular, "but I never thought I'd see it turned into a love nest!"

COMIC PEOPLE, THESE KILLERS

By WALT SHELDON

Author of "Creeping Death," etc.

*I let those
phony nickels
fly full-force at
the back of
Borelli's head!*



You don't want to gag at blood when you're a private dick, corpses get to be part of your daily routine—I didn't know that. I guess I was one hell of a guy to think of being a shamus!

I WATCHED everybody that stepped into that phone booth, even the well dressed kid of ten or so with the slingshot in his hand. That's one part of my work I don't like. Hang-

ing around some stuffy place like Goldberg's candy store and waiting for something to happen. And mostly, that's what my job as a 'phone company detective means. What the hell, to me,

Eddie Wing, fifty a week is fifty a week.

I eased along the counter until I could see plainly inside the booth. I'd put a hundred watt bulb in there early that morning; that way I could spot a slug more easily. From a little distance a slug reflects more light than a real nickel.

You could have knocked me over with a piece of strained baby food.

This youngster, all slicked up in a dark blue suit and cap, brought his hand to the coin box and the smooth surface of a slug twinkled me right in the eye. I took one quick step over to the booth, yanked the door open and said to the kid: "What are you putting in that phone, sonny?"

Funny, it was. All morning I'd been watching, and every time anyone would so much as slink into the booth, I'd stare extra hard. But up to now there had been no slugs.

The district manager sent me to this particular 'phone; it seemed the focal point of the present slug epidemic. I'd been especially called to this town of one hundred thousand population from the state office. It was much like other towns that size: during my courtesy call to the local gendarmerie, a chesty Captain named O'Brill, had told me there wasn't much crime. An occasional triangle killing, a few slot and pin ball machines run by a fellow named Bix Borelli, and an occasional policy slip from another city. No, I hadn't expected anybody real tough—but a ten year old kid!

Fact is, I'm scared to death of kids. I'm always afraid they won't like me. This one looked up at me and said, "It's a new kind of nickel."

"It's a slug, sonny," I told him. "It's against the law to use them. What's your name?"

The kid's face drew itself out lengthwise; he looked scared. "Junior Buskins," he said. "You're not going to

take me to jail?"

I said: "Where did you get that slug, Junior?"

"A—a man gave it to me—" His eyes were getting watery. I don't know why I do that to kids. Hell, my voice isn't rough, I'm just a sort of plain looking guy of average height, clean shaven—

"Look, Junior," I started. There was candy on my words.

But Junior didn't look. He suddenly bulleted out of that 'phone booth; then out of the store before I could take two steps in pursuit. The proprietor, Mr. Goldberg, was yelling at me: "Vot is it? Vot's heppened?" but I didn't have time to answer. I was already pounding sidewalk after Junior, who was just rounding a corner.

Junior dipped into an alley in back of the store. I hotfooted after him, and just as I showed myself at the alley's mouth something small and hard whizzed out of a nice sunny afternoon and smacked me in the chest. It hurt. It hurt so much I thought for a half second maybe I'd been shot, until I realized I'd heard no gunfire.

I saw Junior and shouted: "Hey!"

Junior was already scrambling atop a nail infested board fence, a fence I'd have hopped, too—only I cared more for my double breasted grey sharkskin than Junior cared for his nice blue panties.

I saw that Junior had dropped something at the bottom of the fence and then I knew what had socked me in the chest. It was Junior's slingshot—slinging this little thing right at my feet: Junior's slug. I offered up a quick prayer to Mercury, who watches over all telephone employees, thankful that the slug didn't bean me. I'd have passed out cold at best.

I pocketed the slug, then walked over and picked up Junior's slingshot, thinking all the time what I had to go

through because of a few lousy nickels.

THAT I was going to go through plenty more I started to learn two seconds later. The back door of the candy store opened and a man with ox-yoke shoulders stepped out. He showed a silly grin; I could see two gold teeth. "Hello," he said in a heavy, foggy voice and walked right up to me. He wore a dark suit and a heavy sweater under it.

I'm congenial. "Hello," I said back.

He stepped about eight inches away from me and—*Wham!*

I'd seen his big, balled-up fist coming, but I couldn't snap my head out of the way soon enough. What I did do was shift it enough to one side so that the blow didn't catch me square on the button. It didn't knock me out. All it did was tumble me, backside over tin-cup, on the cement. No I wasn't out. Of course, the big fellow looked like some blurry skyscraper in the fog, and the alley looked like a surrealist painting, but I wasn't out. Just cock-eyed.

I put both hands on the ground and shot forward from a crouching start. If my head had been clear, I wouldn't have been smart enough to do that. My shoulder hit the big fellow right in the knees, snapped his legs straight and knocked him off balance. He toppled backwards, threw his arms wildly, and I dimly heard his head bang into the cement.

Then I was on top of him. I kept his thrashing legs locked with my own and started feeding one-tvos into his face. It was like assaulting Gibraltar with a cap pistol. That crack in the head hadn't phased him, and my punches didn't even tickle.

My head was beginning to clear, and from one side of my eye I saw the proprietor of the candy shop shivering in the doorway. "Quick!" I yelled at

him, "Call the cops!"

Right then it felt like an earthquake. The big fellow just sort of exploded underneath me, and in the next moment, I had sailed in an arc to one side, and he was scrambling to his feet. I shook my head three or four times and by then he had disappeared from the alley.

Mr. Goldberg looked at me and said, "My goodness!"

I got up and tried out one leg. "Where—where the devil did he come from?" I asked.

"Don't esk!" Goldberg groaned. "You chase the kid—he comes in, sleps a box on the counter and says: 'Could I use your beck door?' Quick without thinking, I say: 'Hokeh,' so he goes out beck, so commences a heavyweight prizefight!"

"A box?" I perked. "A box on the counter—is it still there?"

"Sq why don't you look?"

"So all right," I told him.

THE box was there. It was a shoe carton, filled with neat little stacks of phony nickels. And there was a name and number on one end of the box.

FITZHORNE'S SHOE SHOPPE

1440 PARK ST.

MODEL 6077

SIZE 12 D

Size 12D! I wondered whether that meant shoes or skis as I headed for the fourteen hundred block on Park Street.

Fitzhorne's Shoe Shoppe was in a section where double breasted vests and bell bottom pants were still very smart. There were leather factories nearby—there must have been more than one, because I got it no matter which way the wind was blowing, and if you've ever been near a leather factory you

know what I mean by "it."

I disembarked from a trolley car after the conductor had waved his hand vaguely in the direction of a dump, a junk yard and a row of frame shacks. "The fawteen hunnerd block is where the sixth wawd stahts," he told me.

I swung along past the dump at a jaunty pace, to kid myself into thinking I didn't mind it a bit; and my coat skirts swung back and forth until one of them bumped against my arm. Then I remembered Junior's slingshot in my pocket; and an association from way back when clicked in my mind when I saw the rows and rows of tin cans in the dump.

I stopped, took out the slingshot, stooped to pick up a few rocks, then let fly. I was as good as ever. I hit ten tin cans out of ten tries.

But about the tenth one I saw a party of kids coming down the opposite side of the street, blushed a little to myself, and pocketed the slingshot again. I'd stopped blushing by the time I reached Fitzhorne's Shoe Shoppe.

Mr. Fitzhorne viewed the world over the top of old-fashioned oval glasses, he had one snaggle tooth that hung over his lower lip, and on that he hooked a foul smelling curved pipe. He turned the box over and over again in his hands and wheezed at it.

"Model 6-0-7-7," he told me slowly. "Wayul, them's bright yaller shoes with reeyul sharp wingtips. Wouldn' wear 'em m'self if ye paid me."

"Yeah, sure," I said impatiently. "But who bought 'em?"

"Mister," he told me through a cloud of thick pipe smoke, "when I make a sayul, I git too excited to remember to who I made it to. Sayuls are thet few'n far between."

"Heh heh." I laughed at his joke. Congenial, that's me. "Look," I said suddenly, "have you a 'phone?"

"I do," he told me. "It'll cost you a

nickel ter use it."

"Sure," I said, handing him a five-cent piece. It was the first time in years I'd paid for a 'phone call.

I called police headquarters. I talked with the Captain of Detectives and asked him did he know a local hoodlum who wore bright yellow shoes with wing tips. I didn't really expect much; it was just a routine act—so I almost dropped when he said: "Sure. Face Looden wears 'em all the time!"

"And you know his address?" I queried.

"Yep." He gave it to me.

"I could kiss you, Captain," I said and hung up before he started linking me with a certain botanical specimen.

L OODEN lived nearby in a walk-up flat; he had his name on the letter box downstairs. I rang a couple of times. No answer. So I rang some more. A bulbous lady with hair streaming over her face waddled out of the first floor flat and said to me: "If you're looking for Mr. Looden, he's probably dead drunk upstairs. There was an awful racket and yelling up there a while ago."

"Thanks," I said, "I'll go up."

I heard her snort righteously as I mounted the stairs, then slam her own door shut.

Upstairs I knocked on Face Looden's door. Nope. I half turned to leave, and out of sheer habit jiggled the knob a little. The door swung open.

Even then, I don't think I'd have stepped in, if I hadn't seen a pair of legs crooked at the knee and hanging limply over the bottom of an iron bed. I entered.

It is not pretty, blood soaked all over a blanket, and splotted in irregular puddles on a wooden floor. It is even not prettier the corpse that has lost all that blood. Especially when the corpse had as much blood to lose as

this one.

It was the huge gorilla who had attacked me in back of Goldberg's candy store. Rammed dead center in his chest was the wooden handle of an ice pick; its surface was bloodless and looked as though it had been wiped of fingerprints. I stepped closer and then saw why it had been left.

There was a little note for one Face Looden pinned to the big fellow's breastbone. I swallowed my soft palate and read it.

"Here lies Schtoops Skinner. All right, lay off the slugs, Looden."

Comic people, these killers. I shuddered once at all the blood, then beat it downstairs to a drugstore that had a telephone in it. After I'd reported to the police, I got the district manager of the 'phone company on the wire.

"Your little slug case," I told him, "has turned into a nice juicy murder. Lord knows what'll happen next. The Last Judgment, maybe." I outlined what had happened.

"You through?" said the district manager.

"Yeah." I felt a vague disaster coming in the general direction of my neck.

"All right, Wing. Lay off the whole thing. We've just had a complaint from Mr. Buskins who is very prominent in this town that you manhandled his son, Junior."

"Hey—wait a minute!" I started.

"On top of that," the district manager breezed blandly, "I'm calling the state office and asking for your dismissal. After all, courtesy and service to customers is the primary aim of the company, and—"

I smacked my lips real close to the mouthpiece and let a bird fly. I'll bet it tore his ear off.

I hung up. The hell with it. I'd resign before they fired me. I'd be a private detective. I always wanted to

be one. I'd see a lot of corpses, then, and learn not to gag at blood anymore.

I turned around and bumped right into a little black hole in the end of a steel cylinder. The man behind the revolver was short and squat and had little hair ringlets all over his head. His skin was swarthy.

HE jerked his head back over one shoulder. "Walk out in front of me. No breaks, see?" He wiggled the gun a little. I saw. I started for the door, and heard his hard heels clapping on the floor behind me. Evidently he had his gun in his pocket, because the druggist nodded pleasantly as we went out.

On the street, Curlylocks motioned to a dark green Buick roadster. "The key's in it," he said. His voice was up in the higher parts of his nose. "Drive where I tell you."

He told me to turn here, and turn there, and go ahead for a few blocks, and turn somewhere else. And I was so busy trying to figure out a break like I'd read about in detective stories that I almost missed a couple of his cues. We ended up at a middle-class apartment house and when we got inside, he took his gun from his pocket and poked me upstairs. We entered an apartment on the second floor.

The living room was crummy, there were bottles and cigarette butts and parted newspapers lying all over. Curlylocks motioned me to a sofa, and I sat down.

"Now what?" I asked him.

"Now we wait for Borelli," he said.

Borelli . . . Borelli—oh, yeah, that was the fellow who was supposed to run all the slot machine and pin ball games in town. Bix Borelli.

"Are you sure," I asked Curlylocks, "that this isn't a case of mistaken identity, or something. I've never heard of this Borelli—"

"I never heard o' you," Curlylocks told me. He sat in a chair facing me. "But you was snoopin'. Maybe you know somepin', maybe you don't. I gotta wait and see what Borelli says."

"Look," I offered, "I'm simply a salesman for the phone company. I called on Mr. Looden about his bill, today, and—"

"Aw, shut up," said Curlylocks wearily. He leaned back in the chair and kept the gun pointed at me.

Borelli wasn't long. He bounced in, stared at me and said to Curlylocks: "What's up, Frenchy?"

Bix Borelli was dressed in wide chalk stripes that camouflaged his small paunch. His face was florid and dark-jowled with shaven whiskers.

Frenchy said: "This guy come snoopin' around. I was gonna stop him but that fat dame on the first floor sticks her head out and gabs with him. I didn't want her to see me, so I waited till he come out. There was people on the street. He'd already phoned the cops when I got him."

"Yeah?" said Borelli. He eyed me with muddy brown eyes and rubbed his thumb and forefinger over his black stubble. "Maybe the cops'll get there before Looden. "That'll spoil it."

"Yeah, maybe," said Frenchy. "But if he don't come here lookin' fer you, we can get him another time."

Borelli ignored Frenchy; leaned over me, frisked me, and said: "Who the hell are you?"

"A salesman for the phone company—" I gave him that routine with all the trimmings. He didn't find a gun for the simple reason that I didn't have any, so he stepped back from me. "Tie him up, Frenchy," he said. "We'll take care of him after we get Looden straightened out."

going to let me get out of there after hearing him practically admit that he'd murdered Schtoops Skinner and was reserving the same for Face Looden. And while Frenchy trussed me, Borelli picked up the hand 'phone that stood on an end-table beside the sofa.

"Hello, Captain O'Brill. This is the newspaper," he said. "We hear there's been a murder there. Is that right?"

Pause.

"Any suspects or clues? What? Oh, you're still waiting for the fellow who lives there, huh? Well, thanks."

Borelli hung up. Then he dialed the operator, and when she answered he said, "Never mind, thanks. Made a mistake." Smart baby, this Borelli. He knew how to keep a call from being traced. He said to Frenchy: "They didn't say nothin' about the note, so Looden must have gotten there and removed it just before they came. He's probably on his way here now."

"Okeh," said Frenchy. He got up, walked over and turned on the radio, loud. Then he pulled a wooden chair over to the hinge side of the door and sat down, gun in hand. Borelli pulled another chair up and sat down beside him. They must have figured this all out beforehand.

They were seated so that their backs were half turned to me, and then I stared at the telephone and started thinking. I didn't think long.

I jerked my body toward it, and shoved at the instrument with my chin. The radio was making so much noise that neither Frenchy nor Borelli heard it fall on my chest.

Then I started tapping the receiver bar with my nose. I knew a thing or three about dial telephones myself. I tapped it nine times in rapid succession—then five, then ten, and ten again. That was just the same as dialing 9500. And dialing 9500 in this town was just the same as calling a cop.

YEAH, take care of me. I wasn't a sap. I knew that Borelli wasn't

I heard the desk sergeant's voice on the receiver. As softly as I could, I whispered Borelli's address back at him. "Huh? What?" he returned.

"Face Looden's murderer—" I muttered through stiff lips.

I know we waited almost five minutes after that, because an announcer came on the blaring radio with a five-minute news shot; and just as he was stretching into the closing commercial, there was a knock on the door.

"Telegram for Mister Borelli," called a saw-toothed baritone.

I made my tongue go click-click-click. That was a rotten gag Face Looden was using. Oh well, any guy that would wear yellow shoes. . . . I craned my neck and saw Borelli nod to Frenchy. Then they both pointed their guns at the door about where a man's mid-section would be.

A RAFT of explosions suddenly clamored at my ears. It took me a second or two to realize that neither Borelli nor Frenchy had fired his gun yet, and those explosions were all coming from outside the door. It took my two hosts about the same length of time to figure it out, too. They started to stare at each other, and stopped short when a voice that must have come from a forty-eight inch chest rolled up the stairs, yelling: "Come on outa there, Borelli! The place is surrounded!"

I heard Caruso once when I was a youngster, but he didn't sound nearly as good to me as did that good old solid bellow from the law.

Frenchy said: "Jeez!"

"Shut up," Borelli told him. "Let me think."

He thought, and it didn't take him long. He snapped his fingers and shouted through the door: "We got that telephone salesman in here! He's comin' out first! Any shootin' and he gets it in the back!"

There was a small pause on the other side of the door and during it, Borelli jerked his head at me. "Untie him," he told Frenchy. Then, while Frenchy was fumbling with my knots, the big voice outside roared: "All right! Come on out!"

Fine thing! Frenchy whipped the last few curls of clothesline from me, yanked me to my feet and prodded me toward the door with his gun. I frowned way down low and wondered whether these cops gave enough of a hoot about me to hold their fire. It made me bite at my lower teeth to think that I wasn't any better off than before.

Borelli opened the door cautiously. The first thing I bumped into when the gun in my spine poked me forward was a long, lean corpse gently piled in front of the threshold. The corpse wore bright yellow shoes with wing tips.

I stepped over it and didn't even shudder. I was getting used to dead people. Then I looked down the stairs. O'Brill, the Captain of Detectives, he of the bull voice, was down there, and behind him was another plain-clothes man and two uniformed cops.

"Hello, fellas." I flashed them a white-faced grin.

The detective behind O'Brill saw Frenchy behind me, and raised his gun. My heart lost altitude. But O'Brill put his hand up and said: "Let 'em past us. They won't get much head start."

It occurred to me that he was right, and it also occurred to me that a desperate fugitive didn't need much head start. As I started down the steps, Borelli called out: "Back up, coppers, out in the street. One blast out of you and this guy gets it! Remember that!"

THE law backed up slowly and the three of us came down the stairs at about the same pace. It seemed years, but we finally got on the street.

"Okeh, now," said Borelli—he and

Frenchy still had their rods massaging my dorsal vertebrae—"back into the house again."

"You won't get away with this, Borelli!" came O'Brill's booming tones.

"Quick!" snapped Borelli, ignoring him. "Quick, or we plug this guy!"

O'Brill beckoned and the officers filed slowly back into the apartment house's vestibule. "Way back!" said Borelli, watching from the sidewalk. They huddled back into the hall. Now Borelli was only about thirty feet from the dark green roadster. He could leap that distance in a few seconds. He could be a block away before O'Brill and his men got out of the house again. He tossed a quick glance at the car, then suddenly yanked the gun away from my back. I stepped into a half turn and Borelli's first came rocketing toward my face. I took the blow flush on the chin, but rolled back with it. Yeah, it hurt, but not as much as it would have without that roll. I tumbled on my fanny, and while I was still in mid-air, Borelli and Frenchy were on their way to the car.

As I fell, something dropped from my pocket, and when I put my hand out to stop the fall it slapped on that something. Junior's slingshot!

It's queer how your brain can sometimes map out a course of action in two percent of a second. It was almost automatic the way I reached in my other pocket, grabbed a brace of phony nickels and stuck them in the leather hold of the slingshot. It was almost unthinkingly, how I let those few nickels fly full-force at the back of Borelli's head.

Two of them smacked into his skull, I could hear them crack — Borelli grabbed at the spot and fell to his knees. Frenchy hesitated for a shaven moment; turned to see what the hell.

That hesitation was too bad for Frenchy. By the time he got into the roadster, got the motor started, and

the car in first gear, O'Brill and his hearties were bouncing out of the apartment house. O'Brill emptied his gun at the back of the car, the rear window went into two thousand and four pieces, and the car didn't go any more.

Later, we had what amounted to a town meeting at police headquarters, the district manager of the phone company was there, Mr. Buskins and his little boy Junior were there, O'Brill and all the cops were there, also everybody on the local paper from copy boy up.

It got tiresome, hearing them all tell me I was a hero. No fooling.

After Junior had explained that he had delivered some cardboard boxes for a tall, thin man with yellow shoes, and the man had given him a handful of slugs in payment, I gave the reporters my story. I explained how Bix Borelli's slot and pin ball machines were suddenly collecting all the phony nickels in town, Borelli became peeved at Face Looden and his gorilla friend, Schtoops Skinner. That's what had started all the fireworks.

When that was over the district manager beamed at me and pumped my hand. "Heh heh!" he told me, "I was only fooling when I said I was going to ask the state office for your dismissal."

I looked at him sharply. "Call 'em up and give me a recommendation right now," I said, "then I'll believe you."

"Why, sure! Certainly!" He bubbled. He stepped to a pay telephone hanging on the wall of the squad room, removed the receiver and put his hand up to the slot.

"Whoa! Hold on!" I said. I bounced toward him and grabbed his hand. He looked and turned the color of a nice ripe American beauty. Yeah—it was a nice shiny slug he was going to put into that telephone.

I don't know, chiseling the company out of a nickel must have a sort of fascination for most people. . . .

"Don't!" croaked Beucker, "for God's sake! He's loaded with dynamite," but Louie kept on shooting



DEATH, YES, BUT NOT MURDER!

By **WILLIAM ROUGH**

Author of "The Corpse in Room 13,"
etc.

BILL RANGE'S powerful legs scissored on the cold steel girder, swinging drunkenly eighteen stories above New York's ceaseless traffic. His gnarled hands clasped the upright. Lumpy muscles on his back and arms corded as he jockeyed the tons of steel into place. "'Nother inch," he grunted.

"Comin'," grinned Curly Donlon, his slim body leaning carelessly as he signaled the winch runner far below.

The donkey engine puffed, groaned. Steel thudded, clanging, against steel. The riveted skeleton framework vibrated, tried, seemingly, to shake the men from their precarious position. The girder locked.

"Let 'em come," shouted Range, and a streak of white flame arced up from the firepot two stories below. A rivet "pinged" into Donlon's bucket.

Range put beef on the chattering riveting machine. Minutes later the girder was anchored. Range shifted his quid and made people down below wonder if a sun shower was coming on. "You sure can take it, kid," he grinned.

Steel-workers don't carry rods, and it must have been death that reached out cold fingers for the Donlon boy—it must have been death because it couldn't have been murder!

Donlon's face reddened under the veteran's praise. "Nuts, Bill, a guy's gotta be able to cut it when you take him for a buddy. I guess you know how I feel about that, Bill. I owe you a lot. This job. I needed it, with Mary going to have a-a—"

"A little Donlon," supplied Range. "Forget it, kid. If you couldn't cut it, you wouldn't've lasted an hour up here." His level gay eyes twinkled at Donlon. Again he leaned over to spit.

That action saved his life—and cost Donlon's.

It happened fast. A riveting machine shrilled. There was an eerie whine, a metallic "bing."

Range's head whipped up, eyes flashing back to Donlon. He hurled his lean body forward, clutching, frantically clutching.

"Headache!" roared a voice far below.

Range's fingers clawed, missed. Donlon was a blur below him. One moment he had been crouched on the girder. The next, something had plucked him from his reckless footing and flung him out and down—down eighteen stories.

"Headache below!" rang the lineman's tocsin.

Bill Range stared. His brown fingers opened and closed spasmodically. It couldn't have happened, yet it had. Donlon was gone. Happy, carefree Curly Donlon, whose girl-wife was going to have a baby.

Range was sick. Not that swift death was new to him; it wasn't. Death is all too commonplace on the man-made steel skeletons that claw into the sky. It sighs in the wheeze of the donkey engines; its undertones throb in the clatter of the riveting machines; its hum is part of the vibration of the skeleton itself. Death, yes. But not murder!

And this was murder!

Nothing missed Bill Range's blue

eyes, and even as Donlon fell, they had spied the round, black hole in Donlon's forehead. Donlon had been shot. The metallic "bing" was the sound of the slug hitting steel after it ploughed through human flesh.

Range's square, windwhipped face grew ugly, knobby. That bullet had been meant for him. Someone had guessed why George Breen, senior partner of Breen & Beucker, Inc., had brought Range east to the skyscraper job; and that someone was losing no time in eliminating the big lineman. The killer had missed this time and got Curly Donlon instead. But he'd try again. . . .

The cluster of silent men around Donlon's body, now a pulp in coveralls, parted to let Range through. One swift glance told him he'd never prove Donlon was murdered—Donlon's head was a blob of crushed bone. The killer had counted on the fall to erase traces of the bullet.

Range's gaze settled on the sallow features of a squat man in a plaid shirt, Capelli. He started forward. A below cut him off.

"Range!"

THE lineman whirled as a man with thick shoulders and blue-stubbed jaw thrust forward. Henry Beucker was the active partner of the construction outfit, a hard bullying man who could cut it with the best of them. A pusher, but a good payer.

"It'd better be good. Guys don't just fall off like that. What happened?"

An angry murmur echoed Beucker's thinly veiled, accusing words, and a pulse in Range's leathery neck pounded. Hot denial was on his lips when he caught sight of sleek, dapper Jacob Horton, sales manager of the Acme Rock Company whose offices were just across the street. Range held his tongue. Nothing would be gained by

letting the killer know he was suspicious.

"Maybe his heart conked," he shrugged.

"Hell!" It was Pop Timms, general foreman. "Donlon was as sound as this foundation."

Range glanced quickly at the waspish-framed little Irishman. Pop's mild gray eyes were honest as the day. He was one man who couldn't have any part of anything crooked. He'd said, "Sound as this foundation."

But was the foundation sound?

Pop had supervised every mix, and Pop was on the level. Yet stranger things had happened. And on this job, murder had happened.

"Jinxed he was," said Capelli's voice as Beucker dispersed the crowd. "There's a hex on this job. Guys get sick or killed. Tools get busted. I'm betting there's more to go—"

"Shut your damned mouth, Capelli," barked Beucker. "And you," he added to Range, "get a story organized for the inquest. . . . No more work today," he finished and strode away with Horton.

Range looked at Horton's neatly tailored shoulders, then up at the yawning, clawlike framework. His eyes traveled to the spot where he and Donlon had been, then directly across the gap to the office windows of the Acme Rock Company. A rifle shot from one of those windows would have been drowned out in the clatter of the riveting machines.

"You, Capelli," grated Range. "How come you were the first one to notice Donlon going?"

Capelli's snapping black eyes were sardonic. "I jus' happened t'be, is all. So what?"

Range's words were ice. "Maybe, Capelli. But I have a hunch it was the wrong way to be looking. You're in line for Donlon's job now, aren't you?

But you're yellow, Capelli. You'll never cut it up there. You'll crack. And when you do . . ." Range shoved a thumb at the canvas tarpaulin that covered Curly Donlon.

Capelli's swarthy features twitched, then hardened. He sneered and shuffled away.

Range set himself. He had to break the news to Mary Donlon. Curly would have wanted him to.

But at the door of Donlon's walk-up, just a floor above his own room, Range's feet—feet that trod with catlike sureness hundreds of feet in the air—faltered. This was the toughest part of all.

Mary Donlon's intuition was swift. "C-Curly!" she cried.

Range nodded dumbly. She didn't cry. She couldn't. Her slim, straight body quivered, but no sound came from her.

"Was it—an accident, Bill?"

Range hesitated. Then: "It was murder," he said deep in his throat. "I wish to God it had been me. It was supposed to."

Mary Donlon closed her eyes. "You mustn't say that, Bill. . . . But it's true. It was—supposed to be you."

Range's voice grated. His hands were almost savage on her shoulders. "How do you know that? How CAN you know that?"

"Curly t-told me. He caught someone tampering with your safety belt, o-one of the grunts. Isn't that what you call the ground men? He—Curly—kicked the man."

"Who was it, Mary? Quick, who was it?"

SHE shook her head. "He wouldn't tell me, Bill. He said you'd kill the man if you found out. He said once you broke a man's back because—"

"Yeh, Mary," said Range softly. "Yeh, Curly was right." He flexed his

fingers. "If I ever get my hands on—"

"No, Bill! You mustn't. You're in horrible danger. You must go away. You mustn't die, too. You're t-the only one I can t-turn to."

"Sorry, kid, I don't run away from things like this. If anything happens to me though, you'll be taken care of. I owe it to Curly . . . and little Curly. Okay, now? Come on, chin up. I've got some business to attend to now. Yeh, right now." . . .

Jake's saloon was Capelli's hangout. Bill Range strode in, shouldered through the door to the back room, reached out and got Capelli's neck in his hand, and dragged the swarthy little runt into a corner. "Talk!"

"Nuts to—"

Capelli's words were shattered by Range's knuckles.

"I mean business, Capelli. If I didn't think you could help me, I'd wring your greasy neck like that. Talk! Curly Donlon caught you fooling with my safety belt."

"It's a lie! I never—"

Range used his fist again. Blood spurted from Capelli's lip.

"That's it, buddy," said a soft voice. "You've had your fun. Straight out the back way now."

Range felt a gun in his back. He turned and saw a slim, dark, overdressed man, eyes glinting brightly, dangerously. Range looked at the others in the room. There wasn't a steel worker present. He kicked open the back door, went into a small, empty room.

"Give it to him, Louie," raged Capelli. "The lug can't push me around!"

"Fink," said Louie coldly. "You talk too much. The boss don't like guys who—"

"I was stalling him," whined Capelli. "You got him now, don't you? Didn't I say he'd come running here?"

Louie ignored Capelli. "There's a

car outside," he said to Range. "Get in it. And don't think I won't plug you right now if you get funny. We got lots of protection here."

Range's eyes smouldered. This time there would be no slip up. They'd missed him once today. They wouldn't again. Louie was the type who didn't miss.

Range crossed the room, let his hands slide into his pockets.

"Up with 'em!" growled Louie. "Frisk him, Capelli."

"Linemen don't carry rods," said Capelli.

"Frisk him just the same."

Capelli ran his hands over Range's sinewy frame. Range let him. He already had his jack knife in hand.

A puny knife in ordinary hands would have meant nothing against an expert gunman, but Bill Range could splint a cable at fifteen feet with it. This time he had to hurl the knife backward, without turning or aiming. Louie wasn't suspicious, but he was alert. A sudden move would bring hot lead.

Range let his long arms dangle at his sides. Tenseness ruins accuracy. Over his shoulder he glimpsed Louie's pearl fedora. He jockeyed aside until he was directly in front of the gunman. The cool blade of the knife slid down his palm until it rested along his fingers. They tensed, held the sharp edge firmly. Range's arm swung easily—forward and back, forward and back. Then he threw!

On the backward swing, his fingers arced up. The sweep of his arm gave momentum to the blade. It shot back, straight and true.

Louie yowled. Range spun lithely, swinging. He caught a fleeting glimpse of the haft of the knife protruding from Louie's shoulder. Then his horny fist snapped the gunman's head back. Louie folded to the floor. Range grabbed his

gun instinctively, jerked out the knife.

Capelli squealed and scuttled for the door. Range slugged him with the gun barrel, caught him as he fell and sped out the door. . . .

When Capelli came to he was in Range's room, bound and gagged. Range stood before him, flexing a pair of bull pliers. He was swift, ruthless. He let the jaws of the pliers settle on Capelli's swart nose, tightened them experimentally. Capelli writhed and groaned.

Range said grimly, "Who killed Donlon? Who are you working for? Why does your boss want the skyscraper job to fold?"

Capelli's coffee-colored flesh bulged. His feet beat a frenzied tattoo on the floor. Range pulled the gag from his mouth. "Talk!" he rasped.

"I—I don't know, Range!" Capelli gasped for air. "I take orders from Louie or Jake, th' guy that runs the saloon. T-they're working for somebody else. Jake puts dope in th' booze to make the men sick. I'm supposed to steal tools or break 'em, put sand in th' oil, make trouble."

Range's lips twisted. He knew Capelli was telling the truth. He crammed the gag back, switched out the lights and drove his battered roadster to a big, graystone mansion on 86th Street.

"Come in, Bill, come in," greeted George Breen, chopping plump legs forward. "Glad you called. Haven't been here for ages. Why don't you take pity on an old man?"

That was for the butler who had admitted Range, and as soon as he'd gone, Breen's double chins sobered. "What is it, Bill? Trouble?"

"You didn't think this was a social call, did you? You hired me to do some detective work on the job, didn't you?"

Breen sighed. "All right, Bill. What did you learn?"

"There's been perfect weather since

you broke ground, yet the job is ten days behind schedule. You know that. Men sick. Tools breaking or disappearing. What you don't know is this: Curly Donlon was murdered today. You've been informed that he fell? Well, I'm telling you that he fell because he was shot. Murder, Mr. Breen. You were right in sending for me."

BREEN'S chins grew pale. He shook his head dazedly and reached for a whiskey decanter. "W-what—"

"Never mind. I'm not asking for help. I don't think I'll need it. The only reason I came here was to get your promise to look after Mary Donlon if anything happens to me. Will you?"

Breen's plump hand found Range's. "You know I'd do that, Bill, without your asking."

"Thanks then, and so long. I've got to be moving."

Breen waddled to the door with Range. "Look, m'boy, I'll tell you a secret. Breen & Beucker, Inc., have their backs against the wall. I know, I know, Bill, we're supposed to be a rock-solid firm. Ha! I tell you, Bill, if this job isn't finished on time, I'll be back on the bottom. We all will. We'll lose everything we've worked and struggled for. If we do that, Bill, I'll have to break my promise to take care of Mary Donlon. I'll be lucky if I can take care of myself. I hate to—"

"I get it," said Range. "I figured things were black." His gray eyes were chips of dry ice. "So now I have to save the whole damned company to save Mary!" . . .

Range drove back to his rooming house, swinging blocks out of his way to pass the job. It was dark now, and the skeleton's cold arms were spidery against the sky. On the ground shadowy forms moved silently. Range pulled into the curb and vaulted from the roadster.

"Stay where you are," sang a voice, and a flashlight beam centered on Range. "Oh, you, Bill. Whaddya want?"

Range recognized the unkempt hair and straggling mustache of the night watchman, Barney Mince.

"What goes on?" asked Range softly.

Mince spat tobacco juice in a yellow stream. "Unloading cement, is all. Them's Acme Rock Company men."

"Thanks," said Range and went back to his car. He drove two blocks to a telephone, dialed swiftly. Pop Timms answered. He didn't sound cordial.

"Pop, do you check every load of cement that's dumped off at the job?"

"Hell, yes. Why?"

"Did you check what's coming off tonight?"

"Tonight! There ain't none bein'—"

"The hell there isn't," snapped Range. "Get over there and see."

"I don't—"

"You'll get it," said Range, and in short, staccato sentences he told what had happened thus far. Pop Timms was cursing lividly when he finished.

"So that's why we ain't makin' time? By God, Bill, you've got something. If those monkeys have been unloading at night, it means they're throwing in inferior materials. I'll have to test every square inch we poured."

"Do it fast, Pop. If that foundation is like I think it is, it's ice cream. And Jacob Horton of Acme will have some tall talking to do. If he didn't kill Curly himself, he damn' well knows who did. Get the goods on him and he'll crack. I'm going to do some more work on Capelli. He doesn't know much, but he might be able to lead me somewhere."

But in that much Bill Range was in error. When he stopped in front of his rooming house, a shadow flitted across the opaque glass in the doorway; and when Range opened the door, the

shadow resolved itself into a chunky man and a gun.

"Bill Range, ain't you?"

Range nodded, and the chunky man called over his shoulder, "Got him, boys. . . . Okay, pal. Upstairs."

Range obeyed the gun, setting himself for swift action; but the "boys" at the top of the stairs were policemen this time. And the reason for their presence was Capelli. He was still tied to the chair, but now his olive-skinned features were set and wooden. His forehead was a mass of gore. At his feet, bloodstained, were Bill Range's bull pliers.

"Tipped off, buddy," said the chunky man. "Somebody ratted on you fast."

Bill Range didn't answer. His mind was moving too fast. And then he was, too.

THE cops never expected him to make a break. He caught them napping. A mighty push sent the chunky detective bowling into two others. Range dived for the door to the bedroom, slammed it behind him and climbed the fire escape and started to climb—not down, but up. An ordinary person heads for the ground; a lineman heads for the top. Range, like a huge, agile monkey, swung up to the roof and over. The cops who pounded after him looked down for precious seconds before they realized what had happened. And by that time Bill Range was a block away, jumping from roof to roof. The only thing he could do now was get to Pop Timms and speed up the analyses of the cement. Only tangible evidence would satisfy the police.

The first time Range had approached the job that night he'd done it openly; this time he did it stealthily. He slipped through the ropes that held back the sidewalk kibitzers during the day and flitted silently to the blue-print shack from whose window shone a pale gleam

of light. Range raised his eyes to the window level and peeked in. Barney Mince was talking agitatedly on the telephone.

Range drew back and moved toward the door. His feet struck something soft and yielding, and he almost sprawled. He bent over, sucked in his breath tightly. It was Pop Timms, and his head was crushed like an egg shell. Sticky gore, not yet cold, stained Range's fingers. He winced. He had sent honest old Pop Timms to his death. Range saw red. He arose and charged into the blue-print shack.

"Hurry!" Barney Mince was crying. "You've got to get him out of here, protect me—"

And that was all. A short, trip-hammer hook jolted from Range's waist. Barney Mince slumped like a wet rag.

Range bound and gagged him. Someone had been called. Someone would be coming. And that someone would be the man who had killed Curly Donlon.

Range acted. He circled the concrete foundation of the skyscraper, tamping here and there with the butt of Barney Mince's pistol, cursing. It was a miracle that the ponderous mass of steel stayed upright. The mixture in the side walls crumbled like peppermint candy. Even the inspectors must have been fixed.

Range whirled back to the shack, eyes roving for anything that might be called evidence. Suddenly they centered on a square that had been sawed out of the roof. Bill Range grunted. That was screwy. That was wrong. All wrong. Why would anyone saw a trapdoor in the blue print shack?

Then he saw a pair of wooden horses and a plank. They were wrong, too, in there. They could only be used for one thing. Bill Range used them for it, and in a trice he was pushing aside the trapdoor. He peered into the night

at the silhouette of the skyscraper, visible luminously against the moon.

And then he had the answer!

For seconds he froze there, staring, then he moved again. There was one thing that would prove him right or wrong. The steel skeleton. He started out the door.

Then he paused. Suppose someone responded to Barney Mince's phone call. Range bit his lip. Then his eyes spied an open box of dynamite—or what was left of a box. But he needed only a stick or two. That would be enough to intimidate anyone. Range stuffed a stick into his pocket and raced for the 'scrapper.

Every muscle of his lithe body synchronized. He rose effortlessly, story after story, rapidly, quietly. But so intent was he that he failed to hear the furtive movements behind and below.

The moon rode high now, and silhouetted against it on the talon-like structure were two figures. The long, smoothly-moving form of Range was a story above the thick chest and ponderous shoulders of the second. In the first there was the flowing precision of perfectly conditioned muscles. In the other there was brute strength, grim determination and animal cunning. Both men climbed to the same destination. One climbed to avenge a murder. The other climbed to commit murder. . . .

RANGE was breathing rapidly when he gained the point where he and Curly Donlon had been working, but his pulse pounded from more than his exertions. He was about to check the final clue in his wild theory.

Below him the pursuing figure halted, waiting cannily until he had recovered breath.

Range stood motionless for a moment, orienting himself. Then he assumed, as nearly as he could recall, the

exact position he had occupied beside Donlon. The ghost of his memory walked again, and he could see it all once more in his mind's eye.

He saw Donlon lean out, signal the winch runner. He saw the rivets arc up. He heard again the eerie whine and "bing."

Range shook his head. Then he arose keeping his gaze centered on the spot which Curly Donlon's head had occupied when the bullet struck. He pulled a flash from his pocket, but he wouldn't have needed it. The moonlight was strong, and the mark was clear. A bullet scar, the sound of which was the "bing." It was what Bill Range had expected to find, and it was where he had expected to find it. But there was no triumph in him. He felt suddenly tired again. He'd never convince a jury.

The silent figure below him swung into action again, heaved upward. Range's back was toward him, unaware, unprotected. One swift push would send him hurtling after Donlon.

The figure inched closer, still preserving the death-like silence. His arm came over the side of the girder and raised his heavy torso. He flung a leg up. Then he was astride, toes locked firmly. Range was only six feet away, standing upright, relaxed, careless.

Below a car rushed through the street. Somewhere a whistle tooted. The moon shone brightly.

The man behind Range pulled himself stealthily along the girder. One huge hand reached out, groping. Another inch and it closed on the lineman's ankle.

Bill Range moved with the instinctive precision of years of tower building and line work. Every muscle did its appointed task. Every nerve answered its summons. The mere heat of the man's groping hand seemed to communicate itself to Range's brain, and at the

touch, Range flung himself headlong on the girder, winding both arms around it, straining against the iron grip on his ankle.

A gigantic effort and he was free. He reversed his position liquidly, and now both men were astride the girder, facing each other. Below curses sounded suddenly.

"You meddling fool!" rasped the bull voice of the man opposite Range. An automatic jumped into his thick fist. "This time I won't miss. They'll pick you out of the concrete tomorrow."

Bill Range stared death in the face surely this time, and even as he did, his lips twisted and his eyes got reckless.

"Look!" he challenged, hand darting to his pocket and back. "Dynamite! . . . If I fall with it, this crummy concrete will blast like dust. They'll pick me out of it, sure. But they'll pick you out of it too, Beucker!"

Beucker's finger went lax on the trigger. He stared at the stick of dynamite, held carelessly by Range. He was fascinated.

Range's voice whipped flatly. "You engineered this whole thing. You wanted the firm to go bankrupt so you could buy it up cheap. You got Horton to substitute bad cement. You're both guilty, but you're the boss. And you might have got away with it. Who would suspect one of the partners?" Range leaned forward, dangling the dynamite at arm's length. "But you slipped when you missed me and killed Curly Donlon, Beucker. You shot him from the trapdoor in the roof of the blue-print shanty. Look! There's the mark of the bullet on the girder. It's a foot higher than Donlon's head was when he stood. Do you know what that means? . . . It means he was shot from an angle—down! Not straight across from an office in the Acme Rock Company building. Beucker," rasped Range, "I've killed

rats that were better specimens than you! Get going. I'm giving you to the cops. Or else!" Range waved the dynamite.

BEUCKER licked his lips. His blue-stubbled chin trembled. He knew there was no bluff in Bill Range.

"Look, let's talk this over. Name your figure, Bill. There's plenty in this for us both. Look, I'm going to have this whole racket for myself. Get it? You're the best construction man in the business, I'm the best engineer. Together—"

Range's voice was a thick whisper. "Get going!"

Sweat started on Beucker's forehead. He moved with alacrity. They began the perilous descent.

"Don't slip," warned Range. "I might go haywire."

"I w-won't," panted Beucker.

Slowly they descended. Gradually the images of the men on the ground grew sharper. They were on the sixth story when Range recognized Louie and Jacob Horton in the clear moonlight. Louie recognized him at the same time.

"Hey! You okay, boss?"

Beucker darted a glance at Range. "Okay! Don't do nothing."

Range laughed harshly. "He's selling you out, boys!"

Louie cursed and tugged a revolver from a shoulder holster. It had a silencing device on the barrel, and the sound of his first slug whining upwards was no more than a husky cough.

"Don't!" croaked Beucker. "For God's sake! He's loaded with dynamite. If he falls the whole works will go."

"Liar!" screamed Louie. He raised his gun again, laid the barrel on the arm that Range had knifed and which was now encased in bandages. The cradled revolver spoke again.

"My God!" groaned Beucker.

"You'll kill us all! Breen'll get everything. He and I are insured in each other's favor. Wait! We can work something out."

"Not with me!" snapped Range. "And now, as long as Breen and Mary Donlon won't suffer, I don't care what happens. Go on, you little greaseball," he raved at Louie. "Shoot me! This foundation is ice cream. I'll take you all to hell!"

Louie sneered and squeezed the trigger again. He wasn't accustomed to the giant havoc that dynamite wreaks. He was bent on killing both Range and Beucker. Beucker saw it and cringed. Jacob Horton's dapper figure stumbled away, running wildly. He knew about dynamite.

Both Range and Beucker were open targets. Six stories is a long way to fall, but not far to shoot. Louie couldn't miss, aiming the way he was. A slug knocked Beucker down. He groveled on the girder, coughing and cursing. "Dynamite! Dynamite, you fool!"

Then his strength seeped from him. He rolled sickeningly and plunged into space.

Bill Range whirled and sped across the girder, ducked behind an upright. He hadn't been bluffing. He had been ready, almost eager, to die if he could have taken Curly Donlon's killer with him. But now, with Beucker gone, sense returned to him. He huddled behind the upright, looking for some means of escape.

Ten feet out in space a huge hawser dangled. It was used to haul up the riveting machines. Range gauged it carefully. An inch to either side meant disaster, and even if he caught it squarely, he'd be exposed to Louie's fire. His only alternative was to outwait him.

"Lam hell!" yelled Louie at Jacob Horton who was now well away from the building and screaming for him to

follow. "This is the guy that'll finger us to the cops. We gotta get him."

Range grimaced and peered around the girder. He started to shove the dynamite back into his pocket. The hand that supported him on the frame was forgotten—by him, but not by Louie. Louie sighted carefully, and his gun coughed again.

A roar burst from Bill Range's throat. Louie's slug had cut a hot, acrid furrow along his arm. His instinctive recoil made him teeter, almost lose balance.

So it was kill or be killed!

Range rocked with fury. The hand with the dynamite came back out of his pocket. The job would have to be torn down anyway, and with Beucker's insurance, Breen would be able to start again on the level.

"You asked for it!" bellowed Range.

Then he whipped back his arm and flung the stick of dynamite up and out with all his strength. He had to beat it to the ground.

Bill Range didn't miss the hawser. He hit it squarely, both hands and one leg wrapping around it automatically. Then he was a dark blur, burning flesh and trousers as he slid down the rope.

He practically fell, but even so the dynamite beat him by split seconds. But he had put power into the heave,

and the explosion was far behind him.

Range hit the ground running. Behind him the skeleton trembled. The supports strained. The concrete crumbled. Tons of steel rended and ground from their mooring.

Louie had at last heeded Horton's warning and was in full flight. But a glance back over Range's shoulder told the husky lineman that he was safe and Louie was doomed. Louie was running in the opposite direction from Range. The wrong way! The skeleton was collapsing directly in the line of his flight. He was caught. Steel fingers were reaching for him.

Range stopped. Safe, he watched the ponderous mass gather momentum and then plunge earthward. Louie was under it all. Louie and Beucker and Barney Mince and Pop Timms. . . .

Bill Range staggered like a man recovering from a nightmare. Slowly he turned away.

It was finished. Curly's killers had paid. Jacob Horton was still free, but all Range needed to do was walk around the debris and catch him. Horton was shivering, unable to move.

Range shook his head groggily. Someday he would tell little Curly how it had happened. Some day when little Curly was beside him . . . high above the crime and treachery of the city.

STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, ETC., REQUIRED BY THE ACTS OF CONGRESS OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AND MARCH 3, 1933

Of Detective Short Stories, published Bi-Monthly at Chicago, Illinois, for October 1, 1940.

State of New York, } ss.
County of New York }

Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared Abraham Goodman, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of Detective Short Stories and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management (and if a daily paper, the circulation), etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the Act of March 3, 1933, embodied in section 537, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are:

Publisher, Martin Goodman, 330 W. 42nd St., New York, N. Y.; Editor, Martin Goodman, 330 W. 42nd St., New York, N. Y.; Managing Editor, Martin Goodman, 330 W. 42nd St., New York, N. Y.; Business Manager, Abraham Goodman, 330 W. 42nd St., New York, N. Y.

2. That the owner is: (If owned by a corporation, its name and address must be stated and also immediately thereunder the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding one per cent or more of total amount of stock. If not owned by a corporation, the names and addresses of the individual owners must be given. If owned by a firm, company, or other unincorporated concern, its name and address, as well as those of each individual member, must be given.)

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Y.; Martin Goodman, 330 W. 42nd St., New York, N. Y.; Jean Davis Goodman, 330 W. 42nd St., New York, N. Y.

3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: (If there are none, so state.) None.

4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him.

5. That the average number of copies of each issue of this publication sold or distributed, through the mails or otherwise, to paid subscribers during the twelve months preceding the date shown above is..... (This information is required from daily publications only.)

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 1st day of October, 1940.

[SEAL]

ABRAHAM GOODMAN, Business Manager.
MAURICE COYNE.
(My commission expires March 30, 1942.)
New York Co. Clerk No. 562.

THE ALIBI THAT WAS TOO AIR-TIGHT

By W. T. BALLARD

Author of "Letter of the Law," etc.

LAVANT was a big guy and good-looking. That's what started all the real trouble. He was too good looking and he had a way with women. The feud started a long time back—maybe five or six years ago—when they were both kids. Dan Hagggar wasn't exactly ugly and he didn't have a ready tongue in his head.

There was a girl named Marta who lived down on the corner of Third Avenue and Fourth Street over her father's delicatessen. She was a small girl with nice brown hair and big wistful eyes that looked too large for the small face.

She liked to dance and La-

tion and was appointed to the harbor precinct. By that time Lavant was running around with Al Frost and his mob of hoodlums, making a minor name for himself but managing to keep his name off the police blotter.

Hagggar was a rookie and a good one, but he wasn't brilliant and Lavant and his pals took part of their entertainment from baiting him. It was about the same time that Hagggar and Marta had a fight.

They fought because Hagggar objected to her dancing with Lavant. Maybe if he had been older the fight wouldn't have occurred, but it did occur and the girl began going around with Lavant.



Lavant had an alibi, the best alibi in the world—that was the trouble with it!

vant could shake a mean hoof. Not that he took her to dances—Dan Hagggar did that—but Lavant used to dance with her and one night he took her home.

Dan didn't say anything about it then, but he met Lavant down by the docks the next afternoon and sailed into him. Lavant outweighed him thirty pounds and he'd been running around with Sailor Kelly who was quite a welterweight.

Lavant had learned to box and Hagggar hadn't. Lavant cut the smaller boy to ribbons with his hard fists and left him bruised and bleeding on the rough planks of the dock. That fight started the feud, but it didn't end it.

At heart Lavant was a bully and he took delight in annoying Hagggar in any way he could.

Two years later Dan Hagggar stood for the cops, passed the board examina-

tion and was appointed to the harbor precinct. By that time Lavant was running around with Al Frost and his mob of hoodlums, making a minor name for himself but managing to keep his name off the police blotter.

Hagggar was making his rounds one night, far down toward the docks, when he noticed a car with its motor running.

When he got close enough he saw that there was a girl under the wheel. He didn't recognize her until he paused, and he realized that it was Marta.

He said curiously: "What are you doing here, kid?"

She flared at him. "That's none of your business."

"Maybe it is." He looked around.

One of the windows in the warehouse at his back was open, and he heard sudden sounds from within. He glanced at the girl and saw her face, showing whitely in the dusky interior of the car, then he turned, walked over to the win-

dow and swung through it.

HE heard her call his name sharply, her voice carrying clearly through the stillness of the night. There was the scuffle of feet from the floor above. He loosened his gun and started up the stairway. He never reached the top.

For something came down from the darkness above, striking him a heavy blow and knocking him backwards from the steps, to land unconscious on the concrete floor below.

When he came to an hour later he found a heavy packing case across his legs. The building was strangely silent. One leg was broken, but he managed to drag himself to a phone in the office and give an alarm. The cops picked up the girl. The watchman had been slugged and it was doubtful if he would recover.

The girl had refused to talk and she'd drawn a year in the women's state reformatory. When she came out Haggar was at the gate waiting for her. No one knew what was said between them. All the world knew was that he drove with her to the nearest town and married her.

Haggar thought that he was through with Lavant then. Lavant had gone east. Someone said he was in Chicago; some said New York. He was gone for six months and then he came back, more flashily dressed than ever, better satisfied with himself. But he no longer danced.

For some place, someone had drawn a sharp knife across the tendons of his left leg, leaving him with a little limp. He started to go to picture shows instead. He'd see some of them three and four times.

Haggar was a sergeant now—a detective. Crime had decreased in his district, but with the return of Lavant, crime was again on the increase.

The boys who hung around the docks whispered that Lavant was playing up

to Haggar's wife, that he met her secretly in the afternoons and that they spent much time together in the dusk of the neighborhood motion picture theaters. If any of these whispers reached Haggar's ears he gave no sign.

They'd met on the street one day.

Lavant sneered: "Hello, flatfoot. How's your jail-bird wife?"

Haggar hadn't answered directly. He'd said: "The climate's better out east. You should have stayed there."

Lavant laughed. "It's healthy enough for me, copper. Between you and me and that window over there I've pulled four jobs since I've been back, and not one of you guys can lay a finger on me. You're not smart enough, see. I could rob that store next to the police station and get away with it. In fact I think I will."

Haggar hadn't answered. A week later the little candy store next to the police station was held up, the aged proprietor slugged. A pick-up order went out for Lavant and it was Haggar's job to bring him in.

He found him in Reilly's cocktail bar. He said: "Come on, I want you," and Lavant had laughed at him.

"What for, copper? You can't pin that candy holdup on me."

Haggar's face was emotionless. He said: "Orders are to bring you in. Come on. I'm hoping you'll make trouble so I can take you in feet first."

Lavant had climbed off his stool, still laughing. "I'll save you trouble. I know how the neighborhood's talking. I know every one thinks I pulled that job. Let them think so. Because I got an alibi—the best alibi in the world. Old Reilly, here. I was asleep in his back room all evening. I had too much to drink and he put me on the couch himself. Didn't you, Reilly?"

HAGGAR turned and looked toward the old man. He had known him

for years and he knew that Reilly was honest, that Reilly was no friend of Lavant's. And Reilly nodded.

But the orders were to bring Lavant in. Haggar took him in and saw him released an hour later.

Lavant laughed as he passed Haggar in the hall. "Why don't you give up, copper?"

Haggar didn't answer. He went back to Reilly's, although he did not drink, and there he talked to the old man and Reilly said: "Shur-r-re and I never was so sur-prised in my life, for if Lavant has one virtue it's sobriety."

So Haggar had gone into the back room and examined it. There was only one window and that window opened onto the air shaft and there was another window opposite—a window which opened into the washroom of the motion picture theater next door.

Haggar stared at it thoughtfully, then he went out and around to the theater. A man could have slipped across that air shaft; a man could have left by the theater, pulled a holdup and returned. A man could have done it on Wednesday night . . . a man as active as Lavant.

He went over to the box office and talked to the girl. Then he went to the manager and talked to him. From then on Haggar posted himself in front of the theater. He waited there one day . . . two days . . . three days. And on the third day he saw his wife pause for a moment to look at the gaily-colored stills and then pay her admission and disappear.

A few minutes later Lavant came strolling down the street. He paused before the theater and glanced around. Then he stepped up to the window and bought his ticket.

Haggar followed him into the dark house, paused at the head of the seats. It was light enough that he could see the big man as he sought a seat. Then

he eased down the aisle and moved into the row behind Lavant.

It was the middle of the picture and Haggar sat patiently as Garbo learned to smile in *Ninotchka*. But if his mind was on the picture he gave no sign; for he laughed not at all, sitting there silent in the darkness. Finally the picture ended.

Announcements of coming attractions were made and then a voice came over a microphone: "This theater is offering a new form of entertainment. A form which ties in pictures with our bank club idea. Instead of drawing a number from a drum in order to select a winner of our twenty-five hundred dollar pool, we have installed a camera in our box office.

"This camera, each Wednesday evening, takes a picture of one of our guests as he or she steps up to the box office to buy a ticket. In a moment we are going to flash onto the screen the picture of the lucky winner which was taken last Wednesday evening.

"If the winner is in the audience he must come up to the stage within one minute of the time his picture appears. Are you ready, ladies and gentlemen! Then here's the picture of the lucky winner. The picture which was taken last Wednesday evening."

THE screen lighted up and suddenly before them appeared a picture of Lavant, smiling a little, one hand extended, holding the money for the purchase of his ticket.

The big man in front of Haggar started. The detective could see his shoulders jerk, then he sat back, hesitating. There was a woman at his side. She nudged him quickly.

"Hurry. You've got only a minute to get up to the stage. You've got to get up there to claim your prize." She raised her voice and it sounded clearly in the theater. "Here's the winner.

Hurry up."

Lavant got slowly to his feet. He stumbled out into the dark aisle and started down it toward the stage. Hagggar slipped from his seat, but he chose to go in the opposite direction and he came down the side aisle toward the stage, his body almost unseen in the darkness.

Lavant had reached the steps and climbed them. The announcer at the mike said: "Give us a spot, please. Let the audience take a good look at the lucky winner." The spot came on from the control booth, its white light cutting down through the darkness to bathe Lavant in its clear-cut brilliance.

He blinked, trying to look directly into it. Hagggar had reached the steps and climbed them quickly. Due to the spotlight Lavant didn't see him until the detective was almost at his side. Then Hagggar spoke.

"Hello, Lavant. Glad to see your luck's holding."

The big man swung around snarling like some trapped animal. "My luck. It's your luck, copper. You're lucky as hell. I had an alibi that would have held up in any court in the land. How was I to know they had a camera hidden in that lobby? How was I to know that they snapped my picture when I was coming back into the theater after the holdup last Wednesday? But see if your luck'll stop this—" He ripped a gun from his pocket and would have fired point-blank at Hagggar. But he never had a chance.

For one of the police officers, planted in the wings, fired once, the bullet striking Lavant's^h chest. The big gun dropped from the man's hand. He went down slowly to one knee, then onto his face, his big body still outlined in the spotlight.

And the inspector repeated Lavant's words. "You're lucky, Hagggar. You were lucky that the theater owner was

using that picture gag. You were lucky that, out of all the hundreds that went into that theater Wednesday night, Lavant was the one to have his picture taken. And you were lucky that he chose to go to the picture show tonight. Mind you, I'm not criticising you. It was good work and lucky cops are a fine thing to have, but as to promotion—I don't know— Luck might not always be with you."

And Hagggar's wife, standing there by her husband's side, spoke. She had had little to say since she had come out of the women's prison, but she said it now.

"It wasn't luck, Inspector," she said. "He planned it."

The inspector didn't understand. He said:

"How could he plan it?"

She said: "That picture wasn't taken Wednesday night, Inspector. That picture was taken tonight, two or three hours ago when Lavant stepped up to the box office to buy his ticket. The theater officials cooperated. They rushed the development of the film. They helped Lavant trap himself."

The inspector drew a quick breath. "But still it was luck that Lavant went to that theater tonight. He might never have entered it."

She blushed a little then. She said: "That wasn't luck, either. I helped a little, Inspector. Lavant's been trying to get me to meet him. I agreed to meet him tonight—to meet him inside the theater." She buried her face.

The inspector was thanking her. She told him: "Don't thank me. I should have talked once before. I should have helped you then, but I was stubborn, and after I came out my husband wouldn't let me help. But tonight I made him." And the Haggars turned and went away, and the inspector, looking after them, wondered to himself, the lucky stiff. I think he's the winner after all.

COP WITHOUT A CONSCIENCE

By C. S. MONTANYE

Author of "When Murder Means Money," etc.

IN the beginning there were just the two of them in the honeymoon flat Tim Daly rented on the south side of town. Along about June the following year little Miss Daly made her appearance and Tim, plain-clothes man with the Homicide Squad, bought the drinks and cigars. This morning, one year later to the minute, he swung into headquarters with more on his mind than his baby's birthday.

Daly hurried through the squad room and into Inspector Dan Boyle's private office. Boyle, a big hulk of a cop who had battered his way up from the ranks, sat with a telephone receiver glued to his ear. He grunted answers, scribbled on a pad and finally hung up.

Boyle looked at the best detective on his squad. Tim Daly's bright blue eyes

and isn't expected to pull through."

"That's good news," Daly said.

"They say he's been delirious," Boyle went on, "but he's coming out of it now. I was just talking to the doctor in charge. It'll be all right for you to go in."

"So an ordinary heap did what you, me and the rest of the boys in the back room couldn't manage," Daly grinned. "Nice going."

"'Going' is right."

The Inspector wagged a stubby finger. "Trayne's a religious rat. He's already asked for a priest. Now's your chance. If he's ever going to talk this is the time."

"What's the medico's name?"

"Goddard."

"I'm practically at Barry's bedside," Daly said, heading for the door.

The room was on the third floor of



Tim Daly was this kind of a cop: he packed dynamite in both his fists. When he had a tough case, a hard fight, that's how he'd handle it: he'd give out with that dynamite in his two fists!

focused on his chief's red, round face. Daly stood poised beside the desk. He was tall, slim, deceptively built. Until he went into action it was hard to realize he packed the strength he did. Daly was like a wire spring, coiled and resilient, with dynamite in either fist.

Boyle grunted again and tapped the pad in front of him. "Get over to the General Hospital as fast as you can. Barry Trayne got run over last night

the hospital. Queer, Daly had been there exactly a year ago, pacing that same corridor he now hurried down. But on such a different occasion. Then a life was coming into being. Now a punk was going out.

A nice looking girl in starched white uniform blocked him at the door. She had crisp brown hair and long-lashed eyes. They questioned Daly mutely.

"Headquarters," he said briefly,

showing his badge. "Dr. Goddard around?"

"You must be Mr. Daly. You can go in. The doctor said Inspector Boyle was sending you over."

"Thanks."

He walked into a sunny room. There was a seven foot screen sectioned around a white iron bed. Daly glanced quickly at the chart at its foot and went in behind the screen.

Barry Trayne lay on his back, his eyes closed. He seemed scarcely to breathe. There were no bandages around his head so Daly figured his injuries were internal. From the way the blanket was placed Trayne looked flattened out and all caved in.

He had a long, aquiline face, a putty-colored complexion. Part of his nose had been chipped off in some past fracas and repaired plastically. He had a small, cruel mouth and little, tight ears. His black hair showed no trace of gray and the hands, with their long fingers, lay motionless along the blanket.

Tim Daly's face hardened. He didn't like to see anyone check out, but this rat certainly had it coming. A partner of the notorious Gondolfo brothers, Barry Trayne's reign of terror in the underworld had extended over too many years. There would be few to weep over his passing. No one, possibly, but Sid Gondolfo and Maxie, the infamous older brother.

Daly prodded Trayne's shoulder. "Wake up, Barry. There's a pal of yours here to see you."

SLOWLY the closed eyes cracked open. They squinted up at Daly. Recognition gradually dawned in their depths.

"Who's the pal, copper?"

"Me, naturally." Daly leaned over him. "I took a look at your chart. You're going fast, Barry. I stopped around to hear what you've got to

say."

"What have I got to say, copper?"

"Plenty. You're not going to cash in with Joel Sherman's blood on your soul! Wherever you're headed, you want to get there clean. You know it and I know it."

"Clean!" Trayne echoed faintly.

Daly bent closer. He forced his mind, his strength and his personality into the words that followed:

"You and the Gondolfo pair engineered the Sherman snatch! You took the old man to that shack down the river. You kept him there until you got the eighty G's you asked for. Then you got yellow. You got scared. You cut his throat and dumped him in the stream. You did that, didn't you?"

Daly was vaguely conscious of the nurse in the background. He waited tensely, breathing in the ether fumes still clinging to Trayne. The lids of the squinting eyes began to close like curtains falling on a drama nearly concluded.

"Yes, that's right. Bumped the old geezer and shoved him in the river!"

Daly felt a pulse quicken and hammer within him. "You and Sid and Maxie?"

"The three of us—"

"What became of the ransom dough? Where is it? Not a dollar ever showed up! Where did you hide the cash, Barry?"

He waited, rigid, bent in the same tense, taut position. The putty-colored lids closed altogether and a tremor passed through the broken body. The small, shapeless lips opened, twitching as if to form words. The head lolled to one side on the immaculate pillow.

"Father Martin—told me—to tell you. Sid—has—hot—coin—"

A gasp ended the statement. The nurse's hand touched Daly's arm.

"You'd better go now."

The hard expression faded from

Daly's face. A flash of anticipation and satisfaction swept across it. For one more minute he looked at Barry Trayne. Then he nodded.

"Yeah, I'd better go."

The nurse walked with him to the door. Daly was vaguely conscious again of her good looks. Sort of foreign, with her long-lashed dark eyes and dusky, olive skin.

"Looks like he's all through. What's your name?"

"Roselli."

"Okay and thanks."

Boyle listened to what Daly said, but not with the same expectancy the other showed in his tone, gestures and the cold, steely glint in his blue eyes.

"So what, Tim? We've known for months that the Gondolfos with Trayne bumped old Sherman. Trayne confesses it on his death bed. Fine, but where's your evidence?"

"You mean a jury wouldn't believe a dying man's statement?"

Boyle grunted. "With a smart mouthpiece defending the Gondolfo interests? The statement would never get in the records. As a matter of fact there isn't any case."

"Nuts!" Daly said disgustedly. "What more do you want?"

The inspector tipped back in his swivel chair. His mouth compressed. The tips of his stubby fingers joined. He looked like an overgrown school boy who had been out in the sun too long.

"Some of the Sherman ransom money! Some of those numbered, marked bills!"

"Okay, I'll get 'em for you!"

"You'll—what?" The swivel chair creaked as Boyle came erect. "Nix! Not you, Timmy! This ain't a case for you to monkey around with. You're a married man with a kid. I'll give it to Johnson or Swann."

"Meaning," Daly put in shortly, "if

they get hurt the department won't have to pay off a widow?"

"Smart guy." Boyle laughed. "So you tell them to come in here on your way out. I want to talk to them."

DALY'S jaw began to protrude. He stuck his hand in his pocket and pulled out the badge he had shown the nurse at the hospital. The blue eyes went bleak.

"Either I get this case or you get the brooch!"

"Timmy—"

"I mean it! I wasted eight valuable weeks trying to tie up the Sherman snatch with the Gondolfos. All I got out of it was a sneer from Sid and a laugh from Maxie. I didn't catch up with Trayne until a few minutes ago, when all the life was rubber-tired out of him. This is my chance and I'm going after it! If I don't, I'm all through with this racket. I'll get myself a nice, quiet, safe job delivering milk or washing automobiles somewhere."

"But, Tim—"

"You heard me! You think I'm after glory and newspaper headlines, but you're wrong. It's satisfaction I want! It's smearing a couple of old fashioned toughies and putting them where they belong! It's evening up with myself for a lot of disappointments and cold nights down blind alleys!"

"That's enough!" Boyle's voice snapped. "I'm trying to do you a favor and you're shooting off your big yap about it! You know what the Gondolfos are. They're no small time, small town gunmen. They're five star killers. They're dangerous, they're deadly and before they're tucked away there's going to be a lot of good red blood spilled around. Do you want it to be yours?"

"Yes!"

Inspector Boyle sighed and shook his massive head. "Okay, then. What can

I do with a stubborn, stupid lug like you? You asked for it and now you're going to get it. Go on out and get your lunch."

When Daly, smiling a little, shut the office door behind him, Boyle picked up the telephone.

"Get me Mrs. Daly," he told the operator on duty.

He liked to play with the baby when he got home and was off duty and could relax. He liked to tickle her pink feet, ride her around on his back. He liked to rough house with her so that Marge would come in from the kitchen and protest violently. But tonight he had things to think about and Marge, too, seemed preoccupied and moody.

"I won't be home until after eleven, maybe later," Daly told her, when dinner was over.

"Case?"

"Yeah, just going to smell around a little."

"What kind of case?"

Daly glanced at the pretty face across the table. The russet hair, sea-green eyes, the tiny, tip-tilted nose with the three freckles he loved and the scarlet patch of the curved mouth. He winced inwardly, somberly dressing her in black before his mood changed. He smiled thinly. He wasn't going to let a couple of punks like Sid and Maxie put him on ice! What a chance!

"Just routine," Daly said casually.

"You call the Gondolfo brothers that?"

"Say, who—" Daly broke off and glowered. "That thick-headed mick I work for has been talking to you—"

Marge got up and went over to him. "Please, Tim. For me. Give it up. You don't have to—"

"I do have to!"

"Boyle said he wanted to give it to —"

"I know. But he's not! I've got it! I've got it because I'm tough, because

I never give up, because I started this and I'm going to end it! Boyle wants a sample of the ransom money. He's going to get it, I'm going to get it for him!"

"Tim!"

"I'm law and order! The Gondolfos are Crime with a capital C! They've laughed once too often! They're so damned smart they have an idea they're untouchable! They can't be taken, they've dug in and covered too well! I—"

In the other room the baby cried. Marge got up to go in to her. Tim Daly reached for his hat.

"Kiss me good-bye, honey. I'll be back in a little while."

But Marge went on through the door without looking back. Daly watched her go, shrugged and let himself out.

In the lower hall he almost fell over a boy who was sitting on the bottom step.

"Ouch!"

DALY pushed him aside, stopped and turned around. The boy had a familiar look to him. He was dark, might have been an Italian or a Spaniard. He was about fourteen or fifteen, in his first long trousers.

"What are you doing here?" Daly asked.

"Waiting for you to come down. I've got a letter for you."

"Hand it over."

Daly slit the envelope and drew out the enclosure. A few words were typed on an ordinary sheet of white paper.

They read:

I would like to have a talk with you. If this is agreeable, my nephew, Pietro, will take you across town. Or haven't you got the nerve to see me?

The message was signed

Sid Gondolfo.

Daly read it again. His blue eyes narrowed. A challenge? He looked up the dim stairs he had come down. His gaze went back to the boy.

"Come on, let's go."

He got a taxi and the kid furnished directions. The Gondolfos had a three-story brick building in the business district. There they conducted an olive oil and spaghetti plant. But the boy's directions weren't for this place. He said:

"Library Street and Second Avenue."

The destination was the north side of town—a residential section, where the houses had quite a little ground around them. It had been a real estate development. It was laid out like a park. If the Gondolfos lived there it was something new. Up until a month ago Daly was aware they had had an apartment on the top floor of their business building.

"Wait," he told the driver.

The boy got out first. He melted away in the gloom. Daly surveyed his surroundings briefly before he went up a brick path. He pressed a bell. Sid Gondolfo opened the front door.

"You wanted to see me?"

"Yes, come in."

Daly walked into a foyer. It was nicely furnished. Good taste was apparent in the rugs, furniture and pictures. Gondolfo opened a door into a study where a log fire burned.

"Sit down. My brother will be here in a minute."

Daly studied the man, almost wonderingly. The elder Gondolfo was short, rotund, with a high, intellectual forehead, black eyes behind tortoiseshell-rimmed lenses and the air of a prosperous business man. Daly wasn't deceived by his appearance.

He knew that Sid was as dangerous as a charge of dynamite. His political affiliations, lust for power and money had carried the man deep into the ma-

chinations of the underworld. But he was smart, smart enough to keep himself clear of any entangling evidence to tie him directly with the killings Daly knew he was responsible for.

"Drink?"

"What did you want to see me about?" Daly asked abruptly. "Unload, Sid. I didn't come here to make a social call."

The door opened and Maxie came in. Unlike his older brother the other Gondolfo was thin and wiry. He had a shock of oily black hair, triangular eyes, hooded by puffy lids, a long, narrow-bridged nose and a shapeless mouth. He was swarthy and his hands were like those of a musician or artist. It was Maxie who handled the artillery upon occasion.

Maxie went to the hearth and put his back to the fire. His hands rammed deep in his trouser pockets. The hooded eyes played over Daly lazily. Sid clipped the end from a slender cigar, lighted it, blew the match out and resumed:

"I'm warning you, Daly. The Sherman matter is past history. Buried six feet deep."

"That's what you think."

"Let the dead rest peacefully. Let—"

"Like Trayne?" Daly suggested.

SID GONDOLFO'S face lost none of its bland expression. "Exactly—like Trayne. Because," he added softly, "nothing but grief can result from a disinterment—if you follow me."

Daly got up. "I get you, okay. Grief? That's the right word. There'll be plenty of it for you two before I'm finished."

"Grief," Sid continued urbanely, "can be construed in different ways. The grief, for instance, of a father who finds his child missing."

Daly's nails dug into the palms of his hands. A wave of blind anger shook him. He could feel his throat contract, his veins swell with the tide of fury that swept him.

So that was why he had been invited over! Lay off or take the consequences! They were politely informing him that if he took up the threads he had laid aside weeks ago he was due to lose one of the most precious things life held for him!

Maxie laughed. "I guess that clicks, Sid. Go on—tell him some more."

"Trayne did some talking up in the hospital this morning," the other Gondolfo went on. "That was Barry's trouble—a conscience and fear. He was afraid to die! I can almost repeat what he told you, word for word. Too bad. He was out of his head, of course. You don't want to believe what you heard."

Gradually, Daly's rage dwindled. He felt his face cool. He turned toward the door. He knew he made a mistake the instant he had his back to Maxie. A gun jammed in between his shoulder blades.

"Stand still, copper, or I'll let you have it!" Maxie said sibilantly.

Daly's hands went up. He stood frozen to the spot while Sid went across and opened the room's second door. Three men who had been waiting outside strolled in. They were hard looking, sinister. Daly didn't recognize any of them, but he knew the type well. These were the hirelings the Gondolfos used in emergencies.

Maxie's artistic hand slipped in under Daly's coat and jerked his service gun from its holster. His own weapon prodded Daly.

"Take him across town," Maxie ordered. "Dump him off somewhere and shut him up!"

One of the men sidled in behind Daly. He was pushed forward, away from the

nose of Maxie's gun. The other two closed in on either side. Daly was too smart to attempt any rough stuff. All they wanted was an excuse to start firing.

He was hustled out of a rear door and across dark shoals to a cement garage run. A sedan stood waiting there, its parking lights on. Daly was shoved onto the rear seat. Maxie Gondolfo watched the door close and went back to the house. The car, in reverse gear, rolled to the road.

"Wait a minute," one of the men said. "He's got a taxi waiting." To Daly he snarled: "I'm winding down the window. Tell that guy you won't need him any more."

Daly had hardly time to get the words out before the sedan sprang away. Across the northern boundary of the city and then south. His mind throbbed with thought. It went back to the apartment—to Marge, to the baby. He vowed that if Sid's threat were carried out he'd kill the man with his bare hands. Kill him if it were the last thing he ever did, regardless of the present circumstances, regardless of everything!

He sucked in a breath as the car slowed. They were near Getty Creek, near the dye works. The terrain spread out in flat marshes where it fell away from the highway's embankment. No traffic passed.

"We get out here."

A hand gathered Daly's lapels together and jerked him out of the car. He slipped and stumbled down the slope. Muddy loam oozed over his shoe tops. One of the dye works' sheds was to the left. Daly allowed them to drag him into the deeper shadows there.

He smashed a fist against the jaw of the man who gripped his coat. It broke the hold on his lapels. He waded into the second man, swinging with everything he had. Brass knuckles

smacked off his face and ripped a slice out of his cheek. The third man had jumped him from the rear and was throttling him with an arm.

CHOKED, stunned, Daly kept on fighting. Blows poured into his face. The impact of brass almost tore his nose away. The sticky, salty taste of blood nauseated him when he swallowed. He felt a couple of front teeth jar loose. He went to his knees, all three beating him.

His bloody, battered face dug into the cinder floor of the shed. Still he struggled. Then the lash of a three-foot piece of hose blotted out his momentary recollections. He gasped, spit out blood and teeth and rolled over on his back.

It might have been ten minutes, an hour or a year later, when he was dimly conscious of someone bending over him. Daly sat up weakly. He waited for his head to stop swimming, his brain to shake off the pain-haze. He peered numbly through the dark.

"Gosh, mister, they gave you a work out!"

"Who are you?" Daly asked thickly.

"The guy that drove you to the house. You didn't pay off. I thought there was something funny. I followed the car. I put my lights out and used their tail as a guide. There ain't no cops here—"

He helped Daly get to his feet. Back in the taxi, Daly mumbled directions and collapsed on the leather upholstery. In twenty minutes he was at the ambulance door of the General Hospital. A hooker of liquor and the ministrations of one of the young doctors on night duty brought him around.

Daly got information he wanted and used the telephone. He called headquarters and gave terse directions:

"Henderson? Listen, Larry. Send a couple of men up to my apartment right away. If my wife wants to know

what it's all about, tell her I'll explain when I get back. The Gondolfos have threatened to snatch my kid. Take care of that end and I'll take care of the rest. Got it? You'll hear from me later."

He went back to the taxi. Strength began to flow through him again. Sid and Maxie had had their inning. Now it was his turn. Grim resolve was like a tonic that made him forget the stitches in his cheek, the plaster over his nose, the missing front teeth.

The cab pulled into the curb before a four-story apartment house near the center of town. Armed with the information he had obtained at the hospital, Daly went into the vestibule. He kept his finger over a bell until the door clicked open. He went up one flight of stairs, rang another bell.

When that door opened, Daly pushed it wider and forced his way into a living room. He heard a soft exclamation of surprise and fright. It came from the cherry-red lips of a dark-haired girl who stepped back, staring at him as if he were a ghost.

She was the trim, attractive nurse who had stood on the other side of the screen that morning in Barry Trayne's hospital room.

Daly was relieved to see that she was fully dressed. At the General he had learned she had only gone off duty some thirty minutes earlier. She still wore her stiffly starched white uniform.

"Talk and talk fast!" Daly rasped. "Roselli? What else are you? Don't stall, sister, or I'll slap the cuffs on you and turn you in! Answer my questions and I might go easy. Give!"

"I'm Maxie's girl friend," she stammered, all the color draining from her pretty face. "I—I didn't know they—would hurt you! All I did was tell them who had talked to Trayne this morning—"

"Got a 'phone here?" He followed

her gaze to a table in the corner. He saw the instrument there and nodded. "Good. Call Maxie. Tell him you want him to come up here right away. Make it sound convincing."

The girl looked at him in fascinated terror. Her eyes took in the details of Daly's battered face. Without comment she walked over to the table, unhooked the receiver and dialed a number.

"Maxie? This is Jenny. I want to see you—right away. . . . Yes, *now*. . . . What? . . . It's about that policeman. . . . Yes, I'll be waiting—"

SHE hung up and slumped down in her chair. Daly glanced at a clock across the room.

"How long will it take him?"

"Ten or fifteen minutes."

He nodded again and rested against the table. There were a pair of heavy bronze bookends on it, volumes between them. They were cast in the mold of Rodin's *Thinker*. Daly's fingers wandered over one of the bookends.

The clock ticked twelve minutes away before he heard a car stop outside. The bell buzzed. Daly watched Jenny Roselli click the button that opened the door downstairs.

"I'm not going to kill this lug," he said curtly. "You keep your mouth shut! Catch?"

She was very white when she went to the door. Daly picked up the bronze bookend and stood in a position so when the door opened he wouldn't be observed at once. He poised himself, tightened his fingers around the statue. There was a knock. Unsteadily, the girl in the white nurse's uniform turned the knob.

"What's the matter, getting me up here at this time of night?" Maxie Gondolfo began irritably. "If it's—"

Daly brought the bronze weapon



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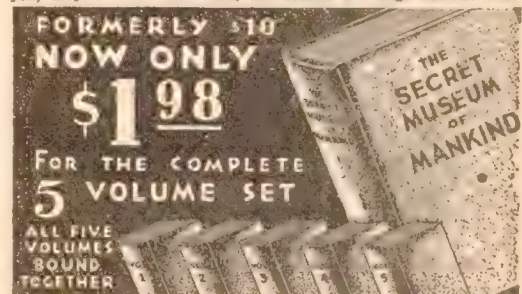
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down in a swishing arc. He let Maxie have it on the bias. It didn't cave his skull in but it knocked him out cold. Without a sound, other than the thud he made when he hit the floor, the younger Gondolfo went out.

The girl choked back a horrified, strangled exclamation. Daly worked fast. He rolled Maxie over, grabbed his gun. He made sure the ammunition clip was full. Then he deftly and swiftly frisked the man.

Daly straightened up, shoving the gun in his own coat pocket. "Okay, sister. That's all I want from him or you for the present. You're a nurse. You ought to know what to do for him!"

Daly climbed back into the taxi. A hot wave of exultation made his heart pound faster. He told the driver where to take him and sat rubbing the weapon in his pocket. The pain had gone out of his face, the worry from his taut brain. He told himself he was almost at the end of the trail. One final stroke now!

The cab squealed to a jolting stop in front of the house on Library Street and Second Avenue. The house with the grounds around it, the air of dignity and the shadows that lay in deep-piled shoals. Daly leaned to the driver.

"Hit for headquarters. Tell Lieutenant Henderson where I am. Tell him I want a squad up here in a hurry. Understand? Be fast!"

Daly slipped off his overcoat. He rolled it in a ball and threw it in the shrubbery near the front door. He jerked his felt hat lower over his mutilated face. Gun in hand he rang the bell, poked at the pearl circle of it until he heard the rattle of bolts being drawn.

A woman, old and wrinkled, peered out at him. When she saw the glint of the gun she cried out shrilly in Italian. Daly pushed her aside and strode in.



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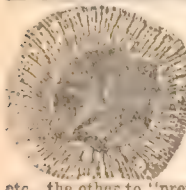
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He saw Sid Gondolfo coming down the stairs. Sid drew with the speed of lightning, but not fast enough to out-beat Daly. The shot cracked and Sid Gondolfo's gun clattered down the wide-margined steps.

A rear door opened at Gondolfo's agonized shout. Daly's three friends of the shed near the dye works began piling into the hall. The automatic banged as Daly placed his lead with quick and accurate precision.

He kept moving toward them, the gun hot in his hand. The first man—the one who had used the brass knuckles—doubled up as the automatic coughed. The one behind him pulled the trigger of his own rod and Daly's hat leapt from his head. Daly shot him in the shoulder and angled two more swift, unerring bullets at the third man who, crouching beside the stairs, was taking deliberate aim.

The man thudded against mahogany panels with a hole in his head. Daly stepped over the figure of the old woman where she lay whimpering and half fainting. Sid Gondolfo had disappeared from the stairs. Relentless as a figure of fate, Tim Daly went up the heavily carpeted treads.

FOR a minute he thought Sid had gotten away. Then, in the last bedroom on the corridor, where a spattered trail of blood led, he found him trying to wedge his bulk through an open window.

"Take it easy, Sid! No getaway—yet!"

He hauled Gondolfo off the sill, jabbed a fist in his flabby face and slapped him up against the wall. The breath rattled in the man's throat. He started to mumble something while his



shattered wrist dripped crimson.

"You—copper—"

"We're going downstairs! You're going to open that safe with your good mitt! You're going to dig out the hot Sherman dough! You've kept it locked up for a long time! I want it and you're going to see that I get it! Or else—"

Sid Gondolfo's panting breath blew in Daly's face. The man's venomous eyes were like livid coals. Daly slapped him with the open palm of his hand.

"Speak up! Do I get that ransom coin or do I give you the same kind of a going over I got? Make up your mind!"

Slowly, painfully, Gondolfo squeezed words out of agonized lips.

"You—get—it!"

The dawn was kindling in the east when Daly went up the stairs to his flat. The patrolman leaning against his door grinned.

"You ain't got a cup of coffee on you, Tim?"

Daly shoved him aside. "Go on, beat it. I don't need you any more."

He opened the door and went in. He heard Marge's exclamation, felt her arms link quickly around his neck and her soft lips over his bruised mouth.

"Tim! Oh, Tim!"

"Still sore at me, honey?"

"Tim, darling! If you ever—"

She stopped. Through the early morning quiet the sound of a baby's cry came to them. Marge turned her head, listening.

"You'd better see what the kid wants," Daly said. "When you get her quiet, rustle me up some breakfast. Am I hungry!"



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